



The American Museum of Natural History



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Ancient Mexico and Central America



American Museum of Natural History

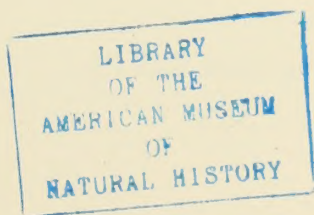
Ancient Mexico

and
Central America

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Photographs by Lee Boltin

The American Museum of Natural History, New York



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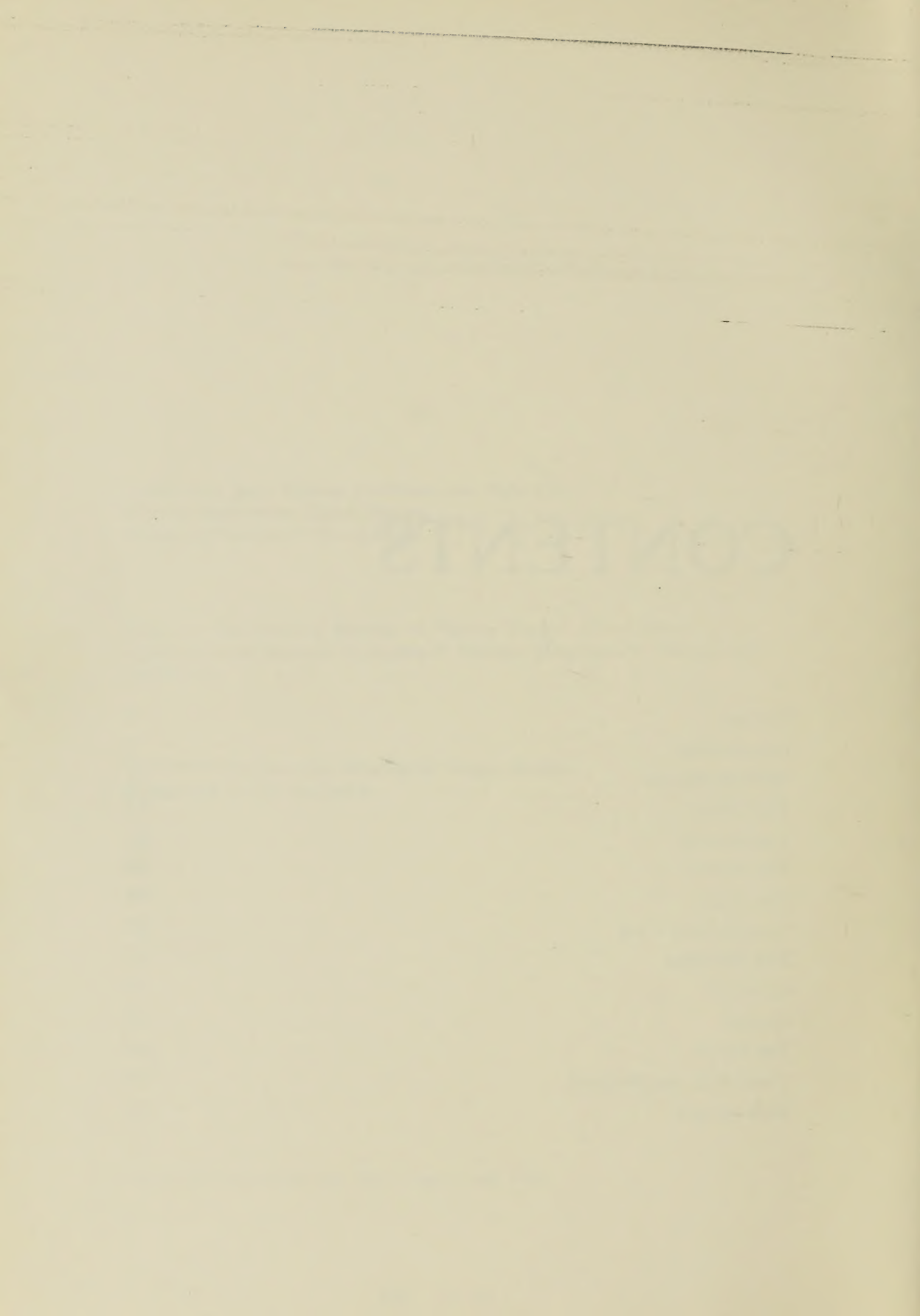
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PREFACE

The American Museum of Natural History has had a long-standing commitment to the search for history in Mexico and Central America. A number of objects in the collection, for example, were acquired by the Museum in 1869, the year it was founded. The gathering of objects and evidence of all kinds has continued ever since. Impressive study collections have been painstakingly built up; covering specific areas of New World archaeology, many of them are the most important that can be found in the United States. Indeed, taken as a whole, the Museum's pre-Columbian collection ranks as one of the finest in all the world.

An exhibition hall devoted to the archaeology of Mexico and Central America was in existence in the Museum as early as 1899; from this base the hall has gone through many stages of change and development. This handsome publication marks the opening of an entirely new exhibition hall devoted to Middle America. In it we display not only the best of the collections that we have accumulated in the last one hundred years, but we also show for the first time many objects that have in recent years been given or loaned to the Museum by several kind friends.

Finally, we owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Pan American Airways whose generous assistance has made publication possible. Hopefully, this book will accomplish many goals. It ought to encourage a visit to the new hall, and it ought to make that visit more meaningful. Like the hall itself, it conveys superbly the extraordinary ambience of the splendid civilization that once flourished south of us, in Mexico and Central America.

Gardner D. Stout
President
The American Museum of Natural History

INTRODUCTION

Before the voyages of Columbus and Cortes made it known to Europeans in the early 16th century, Mexico and Central America were occupied by various peoples — Mayas, Aztecs, Zapotecs, Totonacs, and many others. Each group was linguistically and culturally distinct, but they all participated in, and together formed, a larger unit we now identify as the civilization of Middle America or Mesoamerica.

We think now of Middle American civilization as something equivalent to the several early civilizations of the Old World: Ancient Egypt, the Near East, or Bronze Age China. Like them, Middle America was characterized by large, permanently settled populations with cities and advanced political systems, complex religious and ceremonial organization, thriving markets and wide-ranging commerce, and impressive art and architecture.

The history of Middle American civilization, as well as that of the comparable one in the Andean region of South America, is of special interest to students of human history because its development was largely independent of the centers of civilization in the Old World.

Learning about ancient Middle America is especially difficult, for there is little in the way of written records. We have potential historical data in the hieroglyphic writings of the Maya but they are largely unde-

ciphered, although they provide definite dates for many Maya sites. Legendary accounts of native Indian history that were recorded by the 16th century Spaniards supply some historical information for Central Mexico, but there is nothing before about 900 A.D. Basically, we must rely on archaeology for the elucidation of culture sequences and for knowledge about cultural forms throughout most of Middle America. Recovering history through archaeology alone is a slow and laborious process, and it is not surprising that we are still far from certain about even major episodes in the history of the area.

Archaeologically discovered objects constitute the major documents of the history of Middle America, and it is these that have been emphasized in the Museum exhibition. Fortunately, a great many of these objects are significant in themselves as works of art, and as such they speak directly to the observer. Only a few of the many outstanding pieces in the collections could be illustrated in this book. Some have been included because of uniqueness or rarity, others because they are newly discovered and have not previously been known. All regions and time levels are represented in these illustrations, however, and their variety and virtuosity should give some idea of the richness of the Museum's collections as well as a brief survey of the archaeological record of Middle America.

In the exhibition and in this book each of the regions of Middle America is treated as a unit. This has the advantage of emphasizing the real differences that existed between the several regions — differences not only of content but, equally important, of style. It is a surprising fact, for instance, that the monumental stelae that were so prominent a feature of the Classic Period Maya were completely absent at contemporary Teotihuacan, although we have evidence of considerable trade as well as of other forms of contact between the two areas. Difference in style are easily noted in pottery, for instance: while pottery in a variety of forms was made everywhere, the general features of style serve to distinguish that of each region.

Despite these regional differences one must consider the history of the entire area, for each region was undoubtedly dependent in many ways on all others. This becomes apparent when one looks at Middle America from a chronological point of view. The best way to visualize these relationships is through the map and chronological chart on pages 10 and 11.

The peoples of Ancient Middle America had their origins in the migrants from Asia who crossed the Bering Strait some 15,000 years ago and moved down to occupy all portions of North and South America. Evidence of these early hunters has been found in Mexico, and other recent discoveries have indicated that some simple attempts were being made at plant cultivation as early as 7000 B.C. Maize was known at about 5000 B.C. and was soon developed into a highly productive food crop that

appears to have provided the economic base for the higher cultures of the New World.

It was at about 1500 B.C. that settled agricultural life and pottery-making became widespread, and the distinctive culture pattern of Middle America began to be established. This was the beginning of what is called the Pre-Classic Period, which lasted until about the time of Christ.

Only a few years ago it was thought that the Pre-Classic Period was characterized everywhere by agricultural villages and the making of excellent pottery and hand-made figurines, without any of the large ceremonial architecture that is typical of the succeeding Classic Period. Various recent discoveries have shown, however, that the Olmec culture in the Gulf Coast region of Vera Cruz and Tabasco had risen to its full development as early as about 1200 B.C. This culture included large pyramidal structures, mammoth stone sculptures, and outstanding skills in jade working. It appears that the Olmec originated the complex pattern of ceremonial life and art that was to develop and continue as the distinctive feature of Middle America up to the time of the Spanish Conquest.

The point of transition between the Pre-Classic and Classic Periods is difficult to define. A good round date is 1 A.D., although archaeologists in the Maya area are inclined to use 279 A.D., the date of the first fully dated monument. In any event, between this time and about 900 A.D., there were greater spurts of building activity in all of the major cities. Teotihuacan was the great power in Central Mexico, and its influence was felt throughout Middle America. Monte Alban and Tajín were impressive cities, and throughout the Lowland Maya region many great ceremonial sites were built.

The Classic Period saw many achievements, but perhaps of most interest to students of history was the decline and extinction of the major centers of the period. Teotihuacan was destroyed about 750 A.D.; in about 900 A.D., at all the great Maya sites of the lowlands, architectural construction and the carving of monuments ceased. The entire region eventually became deserted.

The Post Classic Period was, in many parts of Middle America, a time undistinguished by any major events except in Central Mexico. Here the powerful Toltec Empire, with its capital city at Tula, was founded, had wide influence, and disappeared. It was followed by an alliance of city states which became the Empire of the Aztecs, in full development at the time of the Spanish invasion.

Recovering through archaeology the history of a large and complex area such as Middle America is a never-ending process. New discoveries are continually being made; they often require considerable changes in interpretation. New methods of investigation or dating are being discovered also. Perhaps even more important are the new ways we find for looking at the archaeological data we already have.



Pre Classic

Classic

Post Classic

1500 B.C.

1 A.D.

900 A.D.

1520 A.D.

1	Western Mexico	Chupicuaro			Colima Nayarit Jalisco	Aztatlan	
2	Guerrero	Olmec		Mezcala		Aztec Influence	
3	Central Mexico	Tlatilco	Ticomán	Teotihuacán	I II III	Toltec	Aztec
4	Oaxaca	Monte Alban I II		Monte Alban III		Monte Alban IV V	
5	Huasteca	Pavón Ponce	Aguilar Chila	El Prisco	Pitayas	Zaquil	Las Flores Panuco
6	Central Vera Cruz				Las Remojadas Tajín	Cempoala	
7	Olmec	Olmec			Cerro de las Mesas		Soncuatla
8	Highland Maya	Arevalo	Las Charias	Arenal Miraflores	Esperanza		Amatle Pamplona
9	Lowland Maya	Mamón	Chicanel	Tzakol Tepeu		Toltec	Mayapan

Middle America



WESTERN MEXICO

The unique ceramic sculptures of Western Mexico have become widely known and justly famous. Less is known, however, about the region from which they come. Indeed, Western Mexico comprises many diverse cultures and their grouping into a single entity is merely a matter of convenience. Few systematic investigations have been undertaken and thus far little cultural unity has been discerned.

By comparison with the major culture centers of Eastern and Central Mexico, those of Western Mexico seem relatively undeveloped. No elaborate ceremonial architecture has been found and monumental stone sculpture is rare. This may indicate that the region consisted of many small political and social units, essentially isolated from the larger power centers in the east. Such lack of cultural interplay was undoubtedly a factor in this relative backwardness. An exception is the Tarascan region of central Michoacán where a unified political system existed at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Modelled on that of the Aztecs, the Tarascan Empire successfully defended itself against repeated Aztec onslaughts.

The ceramic art of the Western Mexican coastal states of Colima, Jalisco and Nayarit share many common features. Essentially the art consists of small solid figurines and hollow clay sculptures — effigy vessels

— depicting people in everyday pursuits. Noted for their naturalism, the pieces seldom contain the symbolism characteristic of Maya sculpture, for example. Animal figures are also abundant, as are group scenes composed of solid figurines engaged in what may be ceremonial or social activities. Many of the male and female figures are shown naked and are covered with body painting; some women wear only short skirts and male figures are sometimes covered with a small loincloth. A distinctive hair style common to the region — a carefully arranged coil secured with an intertwined fabric band — appears on some figures. Often quite large and painted in several colors, the works reveal a considerable mastery of ceramic techniques. Many are remarkably well preserved, a result of their having been buried in deep, multi-chambered tombs.

The sculpture of Colima is generally considered the most accomplished of the region. Solid figurines in a variety of styles show both women and men, the latter as shamans, dancers, ball players, acrobats and warriors. In the hollow figures and vessels, sensuous, rounded masses are exploited and natural forms reduced to essentials. Colima sculptors were particularly skilled at realistically catching the manifestations of the natural world, making effigies of the creatures of their countryside and many of those in the sea. Dogs are also a common subject. There are distinctive large vessels in plant shapes, sometimes with supporting feet of birds or men, often with totally abstract shapes. Vessels are commonly made of brown clay, often highly burnished; a red slip and black paint decorate many pieces.

Nayarit shares with Colima a tradition for small solid and larger hollow figures, though often with marked stylistic differences. Nayarit artists, for example, frequently carried caricature of the human figure to grotesque extremes. Buttocks, legs and feet are sometimes grossly over-emphasized and arms made impossibly small: many women are depicted in advanced stages of pregnancy; the mouths of figures are often shown wide open so that the teeth can be seen. Coiled hairdos, armlets, and — unique in Middle America — multiple rings piercing noses and ears are common decorations for both men and women. The figures are seldom burnished, as in Colima work, but are usually painted to highlight the representation of both body painting and textiles. A particularly fine group of sculptures has been called “Chinesco” because of the Oriental facial features of the figures.

The hollow figures from Jalisco share the qualities of both Colima and Nayarit sculpture: in finish, poses and the use of mass, they are similar to Colima; in the limbs and some facial features akin to Nayarit. Similar activities are portrayed and dress and decoration are almost identical in both regions. But the faces of Jalisco figures are distinctive: they often

achieve a startling portrait-like quality. Eyes are frequently rendered with strips of clay surrounding large pupils. There are many beautifully modeled seated figures, especially women with large, rounded breasts. A notable seated type shows a figure with a drawn out mask-like face resting on a raised knee. A feature unique to figures in this area is the modeling of fingernails. Finishes on Jalisco work are burnished grey or brown clay, often with a fine, creamy slip and black paint decoration.

Chupícuaro, Guanajuato, is known for the abundance of fine pottery and figurines that has come from its well-stocked graves. Small solid figurines are most common, but in another variety, represented by this finely modeled depiction of a hunchbacked woman, the figures are hollow and decorated with black and white paint on a red surface, all smoothly burnished. Geometric designs on the faces and bodies and textile-like patterns representing clothing are standard in this style. The hunchback is a deformity often shown in Middle American art and it undoubtedly had a symbolic importance.

Ceramic figure, Chupícuaro style. Height 6¼ inches.



Very few sculptures of this size in the Nayarit style are known from the area of Western Mexico; the technical mastery of the craft necessary to build and successfully fire such large ceramic pieces must have been rare. In this figure, which so naturally accepts the place of prominence in this group, there is a distillation of the finest qualities of the work of the Nayarit artist—in the subtle reduction of the form of the body to its simplest lines, easily suggesting a natural-positioned figure, and in a freedom in the proportioning of the limbs. Such simplicity and a completely undecorated body bring the focus of attention to the fine detailing, lavished with masterful restraint on the head of the figure. The face is sensitively modeled, the nose and ear rings convincingly realistic. The most striking feature is the delineation of the hair, one that is more common in early stone sculptures than in pottery. It has the effect of incising on the clay each individual strand of hair, continuous fine lines falling down the back, stylized into a long flat shield.

Ceramic figure, "Chinesco" style, Nayarit. Height 28½ inches. (Details overleaf.)







This pleasantly pensive little Jalisco figure is comfortably seated in a version of the easy posture so distinctive of the sculptural style in the ceramic work of Western Mexico. It conforms to that tradition in the roundness and compactness of the seated figure and its general lack of adornment. What distinguishes this type from the rest of that region is the exaggeratedly long and oval face and features, especially the large and heavy-lidded eyes, that could easily belong to a larger body. Typical of Jalisco, too, is the burnished buff color of the surface.

Ceramic figure, Jalisco style. Height 6½ inches.



One of the smallest representations of a subject favored by Colima sculptors is this little ceramic dog fashioned with an appreciation of a puppy's unique charm and with characteristic skill in expressing it. More usual are the larger forms of dogs represented in a wide variety of postures—sleeping, barking, carrying bones or ears of corn in their mouths. Representations of the dog far outnumber those of any of the many other animal forms found in this region. The dog was one of the few animals known to have been domesticated by these early people, and there is reason to believe that it was also a source of food for them.

Ceramic dog, Colima style. Western Mexico. Length 4½ inches.



Large numbers of small, solid figurines have apparently come from the same tombs as the larger hollow sculptures. They are of a flat, "ginger-bread-man" style like this one, but usually fairly crude and with facial features applied with small pellets of clay. In this example, however, the artistry of the Colima sculptor is evident: it is outstanding for its life-like expressiveness. The finely incised and applied detailing reveal a graceful hair style coiled with a textile band, decorated flaps on the loin cloth, and simple bands on the upper arms.

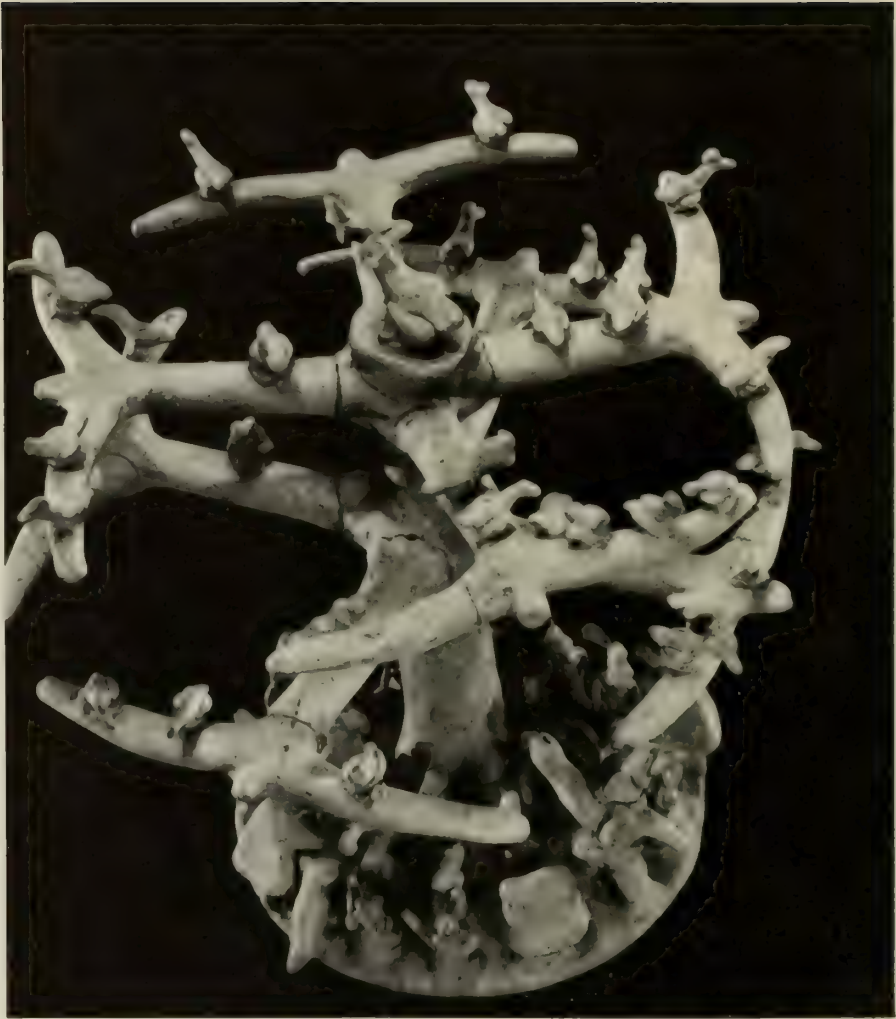
Ceramic figure, Colima style. Western Mexico. Height 10½ inches.



Of the variety of subjects that were interpreted by the Colima sculptors in ceramic forms, a great number share equally in many superlative qualities. This large seated figure, however, of gracefully ponderous size and posture, seems outstanding. In addition to the appealing aspect of his face, shielded from the sides by a close-fitting helmet, the figure projects the quality of having been caught in a particular mood. Like most Colima sculptures, this is a vessel: the opening at the front of the helmet is designed as a pouring spout.

Ceramic figure of seated man, Colima style. Western Mexico. Height 16 inches.





This most unusual and interesting group scene from Nayarit probably portrays a mythological event of some kind that we cannot hope to fully understand. Perched in the huge tree that dominates the scene are a number of birds and two small animals. Beneath the tree and at the periphery of the circle are four houses and a number of individuals who appear to be cooking and feasting. It seems to be a village affair. One exceptionally large figure, whose size may indicate his place of prominence in this dramatization, seems to be either pointing or about to throw something up into the tree, and several of the small figures repeat this gesture. The construction is of unpainted buff-colored pottery.

Ceramic model of village. Nayarit style. Height 11 inches.

Colima sculptors were often eminently successful in their attempts to handle very complex forms in pottery. This seated man, with his hands and chin resting reflectively on one knee, is an unusually lifelike sculpture showing little distortion of the body. Its success in achieving an aesthetically pleasing form is apparent when the work is viewed from any direction. Like the best of the Colima sculptures, this one has a red, highly burnished surface without any subsidiary decoration.

Ceramic figure, Colima style. Western Mexico. Height 10½ inches.





In this modeled representation of village life from Nayarit a festivity appears to be in full swing. In the center of the space surrounded by the three houses is a large jar, presumably containing a fermented beverage. Near it a man holds a cup in one hand and a shell trumpet in the other. Others in the group have food before them, and the entire proceedings are carefully watched by an alert dog at the edge of the group. Two couples are seated in affectionate poses, one of the men holding a fan in his hand. At the back and behind the houses one man lies asleep while another seems to be in distress from too much celebrating. This scene could be of some mythological or symbolic import, but, more so than any others of the kind, it has the appearance of simply being an illustration of a happy occasion in a small village.

Ceramic model of village scene, Nayarit style. Height 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Along with a number of similarly fine ceramic sculptures, this figurine was obtained near Ixtlán, Nayarit, in the late 19th century by Carl Lumholtz, one of the earliest investigators of West Mexican archaeology. As is characteristic of Nayarit-style ceramic sculpture, the figure is clothed, with considerable painted decoration on the body and face. Most diagnostic of the Nayarit style are the nose and ear ornaments, the latter consisting of a series of rings, or perhaps of tied cords, affixed through multiple perforations along the edge of the ear. This drummer is presented in the very realistic manner of some Nayarit figures; more common are those that are caricatures of human beings with emaciated bodies and oversize grotesque heads.

Ceramic seated figure with turtle-shell drum. Ixtlán, Nayarit. Height 14½ inches.



The many ceramic masks that have been reported found in the tombs of Colima are all of a distinctive style, black in color, and with a long, thin-ridged nose and open mouth. Some have perforated eyes and could have been actually worn. But most, like this one, do not seem meant for wearing. Since none have been found in place by archaeologists, we can only speculate that they may have been placed on the faces of the dead during burial ceremonies.

Ceramic mask, Colima style. Western Mexico. Height 9½ inches.



COLOSSAL OLMEC HEAD NO. 1, SAN LORENZO, VERA CRUZ.



THE OLMEC

The archeological culture called Olmec has become known only recently. It began to be defined 25 years ago. Since then there has been a continual series of discoveries. We now think of the Olmec as having achieved the status of civilization earlier than any other culture in the New World.

It was in an area of Mexico's tropical Gulf Coast that Olmec culture originated and developed, becoming fully formed as early as 1200 B.C. "Olmec" is an Aztec word referring to the people of this region and means, roughly, "People of the Rubber Country." But the word has been used to refer to the overall culture. This culture is characterized by a sculptural style that appears to have grown out of an imaginative and religious preoccupation with the jaguar. Jaguar features were combined with those of humans and the mixture is found in all shades of emphasis, from almost wholly jaguar figures with a few human touches, to human figures with the merest trace of jaguar features. A typical face shows slanting eyes turned down at the corners, a broad nose, and a mouth that is often toothless and in which the gum line is visible. The lips are thick, the upper one flaring, the lower pulled down into a snarl that is both jaguar-like and reminiscent of the crying mouth of an infant.

The Olmecs were among the most proficient workers of stone in the world, making monolithic heads weighing as much as 20 tons and exqui-

site, small jade figures with equal grace. They tended to choose the hardest stones: basalts for altars and monuments; jade, serpentine, and other hard stones for figures and ornaments. They appear to have been the first to work jade in Middle America, and no later culture improved on their skill. Stylistically, their use of jade and other hard stones was very bold: no form or line was too subtle to catch. The figures themselves are notable. One type emphasizes pudgy, infantile or dwarf-like features, and often malformation. It has been suggested that these were associated with rain deities. Another type is a standing male, sexless (as are almost all Olmec figures), with a normally proportioned adult body, often a deformed head, and lightly emphasized man-jaguar facial features. A third, often seen on larger stone monuments, shows a broad, squat figure with puffy eyes and face.

The Olmecs made huge carved altars and stelae and stone boxes. They also carved stelae, incised with depictions of jaguars, elaborately dressed humans and man-jaguar deities, which appear on more massive figures. In addition, there are carvings which may be the precursors of the glyphic writing and bar-and-dot numerical systems later elaborated by the Maya.

The stones used for the large monuments in the Olmec heartland had to be imported, often from great distances. It is not known how these monuments were used as many of them appear to have been moved from their original locations. Buildings were probably of wood and rested on large platforms or pyramids of earth and were grouped in ways similar to the grouping of ceremonial structures of later periods. Nothing remains of the wooden structures, of course.

As the culture developed, commerce and trade undoubtedly reached over long distances. Smaller Olmec objects of jade and serpentine are found in the state of Guerrero and in sites in highland Central Mexico that appear to represent Olmec colonies. Notable among these are sites like Gualupita, Tlapacoya, Las Bocas. At Tlatilco, near Mexico City, a number of Olmec objects have been found, plus objects made in the Olmec style by local craftsmen. All are rendered as the Olmecs rendered them in their homeland. This is a clear indication of strong cultural contact, if not the actual presence of Olmec colonizers.

After an era of brilliant innovation, lasting around 600 years, the Olmec culture disappeared, for unknown reasons. But many elements persisted and the Olmecs may be considered the mother culture of Middle American civilization.

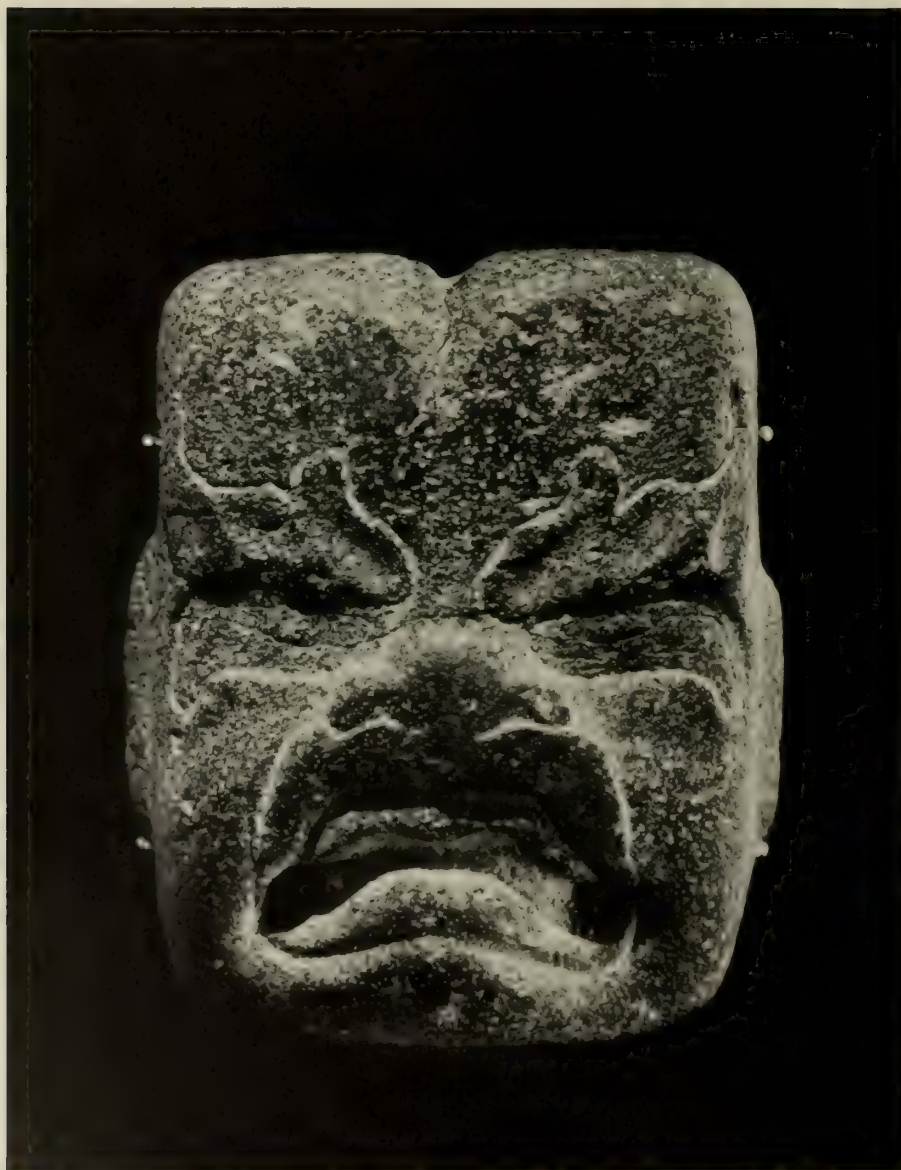
With the sole exception of this superb wooden mask, no objects of perishable materials have come to us from the Olmecs; yet they undoubtedly did much sculpture in wood. This mask was found in a cave south of Taxco, in the state of Guerrero. It may have lain there undisturbed for over two millennia. On the other hand, its marvelous preservation may be due to the possibility that it was never buried, as many other objects were, but was passed on from hand to hand for many centuries as a revered religious object and placed in the cave only in recent times. In any case, it is clear that it was designed to be worn; three holes on the rim show where ties were placed to hold it to the wearer's head. It fits nicely on the head. At one point in the mask's history, the mouth region was covered with a mosaic applique of jade, possibly the addition of a much later owner.

Wooden mask. Olmec. Canyon de la Mano, Guerrero. Height 6¾ inches.



The back of this remarkable granite carving indicates that it may originally have been part of a larger sculpture from which it was cut to form a mask-like plaque. The character of its strong features epitomizes the Olmec stylization of the man-jaguar face: the face is heavy, the nose flat and broad; the open mouth toothless with a jaguar-like snarl; the eyes curved downward at the sides and surmounted with flame-shaped eyebrows. The meaning of the notch at the center of the head——seen in many Olmec objects——is unknown.

Stone face panel. Olmec. Height 6½ inches.



A number of features make this steatite figure, once part of a larger sculpture, unique. The hair style, a series of carefully arranged shingles down the back, is not known in any other Olmec figure, nor are the looping ear decorations or the spirals incised on each side of the head. It is possible that the protruding, bulbous forehead and perhaps even the coiffure actually represent an elaborate headdress. The strong jaguar muzzle combined with a beard is visually surprising, but beards are not uncommon in Olmec art. The beard may have been, as it was later in Mexico, the mark of an important personage. In his arms the jaguar-man carries an object of unknown significance.

Olmec figure. Dark green serpentine. Height 5¼ inches. Loaned by Alastair Bradley Martin.



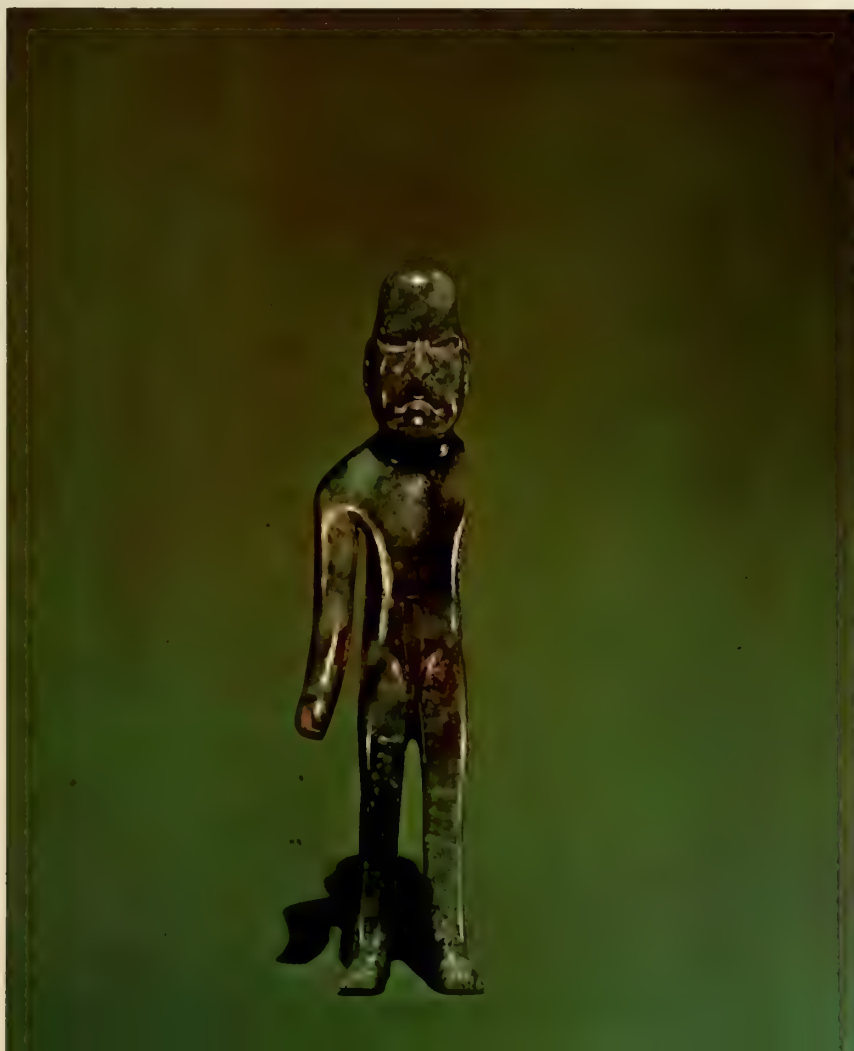


Known as the Kunz Axe because it was owned at the turn of the century by Frederick Kunz, a gem expert at Tiffany's in New York, this jade ceremonial axe has a distinctive place in the history of Olmec objects. It is one of the largest jade artifacts ever found in Middle America and one of fewer than a dozen such large Olmec stone ceremonial axes. The Kunz Axe weighs 15½ pounds. It once weighed more, but a portion of the back was cut away, probably to make other objects. The axe is made of blue-green jade. It represents a typical man-jaguar with an exaggerated mouth, interlocking fangs, a broad nose and slanting eyes. What appears to be a knife is held to the chest.

Ceremonial Axe. Olmec. Blue-green jade. Height 11 inches.

Such naturally posed figures of jade are a distinct Olmec sculptural type: a nude without sexual features but tending toward maleness. In this case, the figure is thinner and more elongated than usual. Characteristic of such figures is a stance with the knees slightly bent and some indication of a loin cloth. In ancient times the left arm of this figure was inexplicably sawn off—probably by the Olmecs themselves.

Olmec standing man. Jade. Height 5½ inches.



Right:

An American Museum expedition, led by George C. Vaillant, found this figure in 1932 at Gualupita, near Cuernavaca. Along with finds from other sources—the Kunz axe and the Necaxa tiger—it furnished Vaillant and other archeologists with clues that led to the identification of the Olmec culture. This figure, Olmec in style, was found among the effects of a non-Olmec people who lived in the Central Highlands of Mexico during the time of the flowering of the Olmec culture, and were influenced by the artistic traits of the Olmecs. The figurine has typically Olmec infantile features. The upper lip has the characteristic flare, but instead of the customary toothless gums ending in the gum point, the two central teeth are clearly shown.

Ceramic figure. Olmec style. Gualupita, Cuernavaca, Morelos. Height 11 inches.

Below:

Probably from the State of Morelos, this figure represents a Pre-Classic style that includes some of the largest figurines known. All depict women. While some have hats or unusual hairdos, and occasionally grotesque features, the majority share this form: they are nude, with heavy thighs and hips, pierced navels, slit eyes and curved eyebrows, and triangular arms ending in tiny hands.

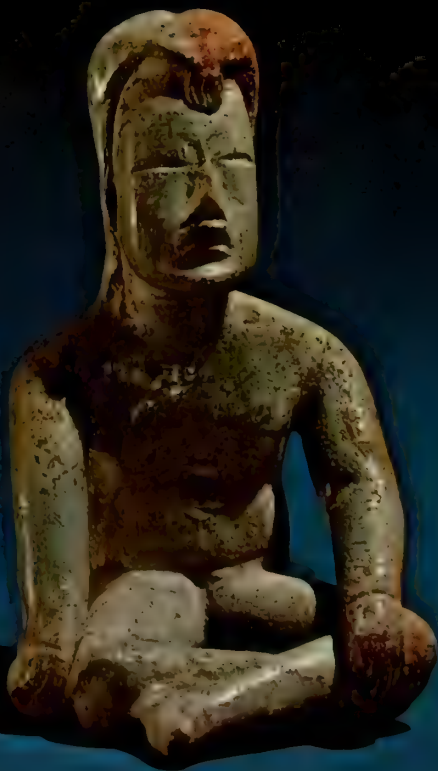
Ceramic figure. Pre-Classic Period. Probably from Santa Cruz, Morelos. Height 18¾ inches. Gift from Mrs. J. M. Kaplan.





Perhaps the finest clay figurines yet found in Central Mexico come from the Pre-Classic site of Las Bocas in Puebla. Most have the simplified, strong faces, profiles and striking hairdos exemplified by this seated man; their eyes commonly show no pupils, and all are nearly sexless. The white slip, the infantile-jaguar features, the form and posture, clearly mark the influence of the Olmecs in Central Mexico. The hair of this figure is painted with a red pigment, perhaps a depiction of an actual custom. The crimped drop at the point of the hair on the forehead may represent an ornament.

Ceramic figure. Olmec style. Probably from Las Bocas, Puebla. Height 3½ inches.



Washed out of a mound in 1909 in Necaxa, during the construction of a dam, this man-jaguar combines animal features with the form of a seated man. The mixed characteristics are typically Olmec. The head is elongated and backward sloping in a manner favored by Olmec sculptors, possibly representing cranial deformation. Man-jaguar faces are incised on the cheeks; other incisions depict a necklace and wristlets, a glyph, and sash. The arrangement of holes drilled through the base suggests the jade may have been mounted on a staff.

Man-jaguar figure. Olmec. Green jade. Necaxa, Puebla. Height 3½ inches.



AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE PYRAMID OF THE SUN, TEOTIHUACAN.



TEOTIHUACAN

Middle America's great period was the Classic, identified in most regions by population expansion and by the appearance of ceremonial centers with large scale architecture and more elaborate religious symbolism. The best example of these changes is the city of Teotihuacán, with its grandiose ceremonial buildings. Situated in the Valley of Mexico, this city became the most highly urbanized in ancient Middle America. At its height, it covered over 8 square miles. Traces of the distinctive style it generated can be found in many contemporaneous religious centers, from Tajín in the north to Kaminaljuyú and Tikál in both the highlands and lowlands of Guatemala.

Teotihuacán has become the best known archeological site in all of Mexico. It is noted especially for its great pyramids, the Temple of the Sun — 700 feet on a side and 213 feet in height — and the slightly smaller Temple of the Moon. Both were originally capped with what must have been magnificent buildings, all evidence of which has disappeared. Another important structure which is located, like the great pyramids, on a broad avenue known as the Street of the Dead, is the Citadel. To call it a citadel is misleading, for it is not a fort; rather it is a grand plaza with pyramid temples on its walls and in the center the remains of the sculptured Temple of Quetzalcóatl. Many other pyramid structures flank the Street of the

Dead or are grouped in its vicinity. The larger pyramids and parts of the Citadel were built in the earliest stages of the development of the city, at about the time of Christ.

Although notable works of sculpture do occur in several structures at Teotihuacán its architecture is generally noted for its unadorned simplicity of line — quite different from the elaborately decorated buildings of contemporary Classic Period Maya sites. It was, however, a more colorful and distinctive city than would appear from the present aspect of its ruins, for the surfaces of the buildings were coated with white or colored plaster and many walls, both interior and exterior, were covered with fresco paintings portraying a wide variety of symbolic scenes. One sees that the religious art of Teotihuacán was largely expressed in painting, more fragile, of course, than stone and visible today in only a very fragmentary state.


There is no written history referring to Teotihuacán, and the nature and quality of its society must be inferred from its archaeological remains and by looking back from our knowledge of the later Aztec period. We can be certain that Tlaloc — a rain deity — was the most important god of ancient Teotihuacán, for his image, represented by the same iconographic symbols as those used by the Aztec, is repeated everywhere in figurines and frescos. Xipe, the flayed one, was present though less prominently, and the concept of the feathered serpent, supposedly of the God Quetzalcóatl, is also evident.

There is a tendency to think that life in Teotihuacán was essentially peaceful because there are no depictions of warriors, battles or human sacrifice. It is probable, however, that this dearth of evidence is misleading and that the wide influence of Teotihuacán was the result of military conquest. It also appears likely that the city of Teotihuacán was destroyed by either intruders or by internal conflict about 750 A.D. — another indication that the nature of a society cannot easily be deduced from its art.

This delicate, brilliantly-painted pottery vessel embodies features and techniques peculiar to the fine artistic productions of Teotihuacán. Made with thin walls and with a special variety of clay, it is a ware known as "thin orange," produced only during the Classic Period in Central Mexico. The subtle shaping of the jar and the tiny feet are characteristic. The fresco technique and the brilliance and variety of the colors recall the frescos found on the walls of many buildings at Teotihuacán. Typical also of the style is the geometric abstraction of the face and headdress as well as the motif of the flower on the neck of the vessel.

Fresco decorated ceramic vessel. Teotihuacán style. Height 8½ inches.





The provenance of this intriguing effigy jar is unknown, but it is clearly of Teotihuacán style and may have come from that site itself. It is unique, although similar pieces have been excavated at the Teotihuacán-influenced center of Kaminaljuyú in Highland Guatemala.

The head of the figure forms the lid of the vessel. The carved designs crossing each eye appear to be a symbolic representation of a snake on the right of the figure and on the left a butterfly. Both of these are associated with water or rain—evidently a constant concern at Teotihuacán. Incised around the waist is a belt knotted at the front and from which, both front and rear, a breech cloth falls. Originally the vessel had two round supports at the front and a slab-like one at the rear, now missing.

Ceramic effigy jar with lid. Teotihuacán style. Height 10¾ inches.



Aztec myths refer to a Mother of the Gods who gives birth to a number of the many deities in their pantheon. It is tempting to think of this figurine of the earlier Teotihuacan period as illustrating such a concept. It is a seated figure from which the front can be removed, revealing one large and eight smaller figures inside the body.

Ceramic figure with removable front. Teotihuacan. Height 8 inches.







Above left:

While depictions of pyramid-temples are known from other regions, this pyramid-form pottery vessel is exceptional in being identifiable with the Teotihuacán culture. It has features distinctive of the Teotihuacán style—sloping surfaces topped by protruding panels and a stairway fitted out with projecting elements comparable to the serpent heads similarly placed in the Temple of Quetzalcóatl at Teotihuacán.

Still another Teotihuacán feature is the use of the special clay known as “thin orange.” This ware usually has a smooth orange surface, but in this case it has a red color not unlike that of typical Colima ceramic sculptures. It is said to have been found in the state of Puebla.

Pottery vessel in form of pyramid. Teotihuacán style. Said to be from Puebla. Height 4½ inches.

Above right:

Ceramic molds first appear in Middle America during the Classic Period and at Teotihuacán are very commonly used for the making of figurines and various elements of pottery vessels. In this imposingly large cylindrical jar the legs are mold-made in the usual manner, but the relief decoration is a more uncommon adaptation of the use of the mold. Presumably a thin layer of clay was pressed into a large flat mold bearing the design and then somehow applied to the still plastic vessel. The design that is repeated on opposite side of the vessel is of a richly costumed figure holding shield and spear, a large speech scroll emerging from his mouth.

Ceramic vessel. Teotihuacán style. Height 12½ inches.



Above left:

This fine example of a Teotihuacán cylindrical tripod vessel has mold-made supports and a very delicately incised design on a well-burnished dark brown surface. Cylindrical tripods of slightly varying form and size and with differing kinds of decoration are the most distinctive form of ceremonial pottery at Teotihuacan. Many examples have conical covers.

Ceramic vessel. Teotihuacán style. Height 5¼ inches.

Above right:

The general form of this pottery vessel permits it to be identified as of Teotihuacán style. The use of an open-work tracery in a plaited effect enclosing the lower part of the vase is rare, however. While the braided or interwoven pattern forming the decoration of this vessel is a much repeated and probably symbolic motif in Maya art, its meaning is obscure. The jar was reportedly found in Highland Guatemala.

Ceramic vessel with open lattice-work. Said to be from Highland Guatemala. Height 5½ inches.

THE TEMPLE OF QUETZALCOATL AT TULA.



THE TOLTEC

After the fall of Teotihuacán, several centuries passed before the required alliances were formed and any single powerful unit was again established to leave its mark on the history of Mexico. The center of this new fusion was the city of Tula, north of present Mexico City. It was occupied by a people known as Toltecs. The legendary histories written at the time of the Spanish Conquest give a view, although meager, of the rise of the Toltecs, a list of their leaders, and an account of Tula's subsequent fall. These chronicles, the first written history of Middle America, speak of the arrival in the 10th Century of Mixcóatl, a great war lord, and describe in a mixture of history and mythology the annals of his people, the Toltecs, through contact with the ancient civilized peoples of the south and east and artisan refugees from Teotihuacán, they absorbed the earlier traditions of Central Mexico. This union is symbolized in the chronicles by the marriage of Mixcóatl and a woman of the old southern people, their issue being the great cultural hero Queztalcóatl, who moved the Toltec capital from Culhuacán to Tula. The new spirit of Post-Classic Middle America can be traced at Tula in architectural stone reliefs picturing warrior cults, war and sacrifices.

It is probable that Tula was the center of a great tribute empire similar to that achieved earlier at Teotihuacán and later by the Aztecs. But the

Toltecs were not great artisans; indeed, it seems evident that they took much inspiration from the Mixtec people with whom they had joined. Their city, Tula, had none of the solid, well constructed buildings of, say, the Maya. Their construction shows more concern for a show of power than for permanence. Techniques were often slap-dash and materials flimsy, creating a superficial extravagance somewhat like a World's Fair.

The political importance of Tula is indicated especially by the fact that the Toltecs had an overwhelming influence on the architecture of Chichén Itzá, located far away in the northern part of the Yucatán peninsula. We see there a blending of the older Maya techniques of building with the complete complex of iconographic and ornamental elements found at Tula — evidence that suggests a complete domination of the local scene by conquerors from Central Mexico. The Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Tula, with its colonnades and its serpent columns, is duplicated in detail but much more elegantly in the Temple of the Warriors at Chichén Itzá. Another one of the many elements included in the transfer was the well known figure of the Chac Mool — a man resting on his back with his head and knees up and an offering plate on his stomach.

The Toltec Period saw the first introduction of metal working into Middle America, apparently diffusing up the Central American isthmus from South America where it was known much earlier. Little evidence of metals has been found at Tula, but many fine examples have come from Toltec Period deposits at Chichén Itzá, particularly from the famous cenote of sacrifice.

Quickly organized, Tula was also quickly destroyed, its society coming to an end in the 13th century. The Toltecs, however, continued to live in the minds of the succeeding Aztecs who thought of them as their ancestors and cultural heroes, founders of all that was good in their society.

Said to have been found near Chalco in the Valley of Mexico, this fragment of a collar-shaped shell pendant bears an engraved design typical of Toltec art. Some of its motifs are duplicated in stone sculptures from Tula, but the closest parallels are with paintings and stone reliefs at Chichén Itzá. It is only in Toltec-style art, for instance, that one sees bulky padded sleeves, probably a protective device of warriors. The scene appears to center on an altar on which stands a plant in a bowl which may be a representation of *one acatl*, the day name of Quetzalcóatl and a symbolic representation of that important Toltec deity. The man on the left points and gestures; the one on the far right carries a pack on his back. Facing the altar, one man holds a bowl while another probes it with a long instrument. A plant with leaves and flowers serves as a decorative background. It is a work of art and a document, the reading of which must be speculative.

Fragment of incised shell pendant. Toltec style. Length 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches.



A unique pottery known as Plumbate ware was widely distributed in Middle America during the Toltec Period. Apparently made in the Pacific coastal region of Guatemala just southeast of the Mexican border, it was traded widely in all directions. It is easily identified by its shiny glaze-like surface that varies in color from orange to olive-green and serves, wherever found, as a time marker of the early Post-Classic horizon. Plumbate appears in varied effigy forms—human, jaguar, monkey and bird. The example shown here is one of the largest and finest of the Plumbate vessels known. The vase shows a kneeling, hunchbacked old man. A fringe of hair shows below the sling, or tumpline, knotted on his forehead supporting the jar on his back. This method of carrying burdens was used by Indians throughout the Americas. The figure wears sandals, and a breechclout; bracelets and ornaments tied below his knees are indicated by incised lines. The ware was prized in its time; imitations have been found, but none reproduced the fine finish of true Plumbate.

Ceramic effigy vessel. Plumbate ware. Height 10¼ inches.



Acquired in 1896 during an American Museum expedition, this life-size Toltec figure was reportedly found in a cave near Texcoco. A few others of this size are known; the largest ceramic figures fired by Middle American potters. The figure represents Xipe-Totec, "our lord the flayed one," an ancient god whose cult spread widely in Middle America and lasted until historical times. Xipe was a water god, associated with spring rains and new vegetation. In a version of the rites in Xipe's honor—a ceremony to insure rain—a human victim was sacrificed with arrows, his blood was permitted to fall to the ground in imitation of rain and his flayed skin was then donned by a priest. In this figure, the priest wears a scale-like covering, probably a stylization of dried skin; he also wears a mask of skin depicting Xipe's features: closed eyes with crescent lids and an open mouth suggest the victim in death. Such rites were widely practiced by Middle American peoples to influence and propitiate the powerful forces of nature.

Ceramic sculpture of Xipe-Totec. Toltec. Coatlinchán, State of Mexico. Height 60 inches.



A MODEL OF TENOCHTITLAN IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEXICO.



THE AZTEC

Perhaps a century after the fall of Tula, another grouping of city states was achieved and the larger Aztec state emerged, more successful, certainly, than that of Tula. It was destined to be destroyed by the intrusion of Cortes in 1521. This sparse description of the origin of the Aztecs may be unsatisfying, but it is probably more realistic than the usual romanticized accounts of Aztec history. According to the legendary stories, the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico as an uncouth and aggressive tribe. They encountered a warring group of city-states composed partly of other barbarians who had preceded them and partly of the civilized descendants of the ancient cultures of Central Mexico. Shunted in 1325 to an undesirable island in the midst of a marsh, where presumably they could do little harm, the Aztecs quickly showed their adaptability. Through diplomacy, alliances, political intrigues and force, they emerged by the beginning of the 16th century as the unquestioned rulers of Mexico, their power extending as far south as Guatemala, from coast to coast, and to the northern reaches of Middle America. A wealth of tribute from almost 40 provinces flowed to their capital, Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City. Their rude island site had evolved into a huge metropolis of 70,000 persons. At its heart lay the great plaza, the present Zócalo. In the city all the civilized arts were practised. The enormous market displayed the countless

products of the empire, and the powerful members of the elite led lives of great luxury.

The Aztecs were a martial people in whose society the brave warrior became the ideal. This was not, however, a notion based exclusively on an appetite for conquest; the Aztec conception of nature saw an uncertain balance between the forces of regeneration and the darkness of the void. Only sacrifice could maintain the balance. This concept, with its accompanying propitiatory ritual, infused every phase of Aztec life. To insure the passage each day of the sun across the heavens and its return each morning from the perilous journey through the realm of night, hearts and blood must nourish it. Human sacrifice reached a height with the Aztecs unknown in any other culture of the New World.

For its awesome power, the monumental religious sculpture of the Aztecs is one of the greatest artistic achievements of Middle America. Ever present in the large monuments are macabre images, friezes of skulls, and images of the great goddess Coatlicue, with her death's head, a skirt of writhing snakes and ornaments of skulls. The much smaller sculpture, in contrast, is distinctively simple. It shows figures of common people and small unencumbered statues of gods and goddesses. In their smaller stone sculpture, particularly that depicting animals, the Aztecs fully indulged their taste for realism and accuracy, showing rabbits, snakes, grasshoppers and other creatures, often larger than life.

In 1519, Hernando Cortes landed on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. It was the same year in which it was predicted that Quetzalcóatl, the great culture hero of the Toltecs, would return from the East to reclaim his dominions. Because of the Aztec preoccupation with prophecy, this coincidence undoubtedly contributed to the Emperor Montezuma's fatalism and indecision in the face of the Spanish threat to his reign. Moreover, because of the almost universal hatred directed toward Aztec overlords by the people, Cortes had little difficulty in raising native allies against the city of Tenochtitlán. Scarcely two years after Cortes' arrival, less than two centuries after Tenochtitlán was founded as a miserable home of a despised people and had grown into the heart of the most extensive empire Middle America had known, the Spaniards and their allies took the city and razed it. Spanish priests efficiently organized the destruction of those pagan works that survived the final siege.

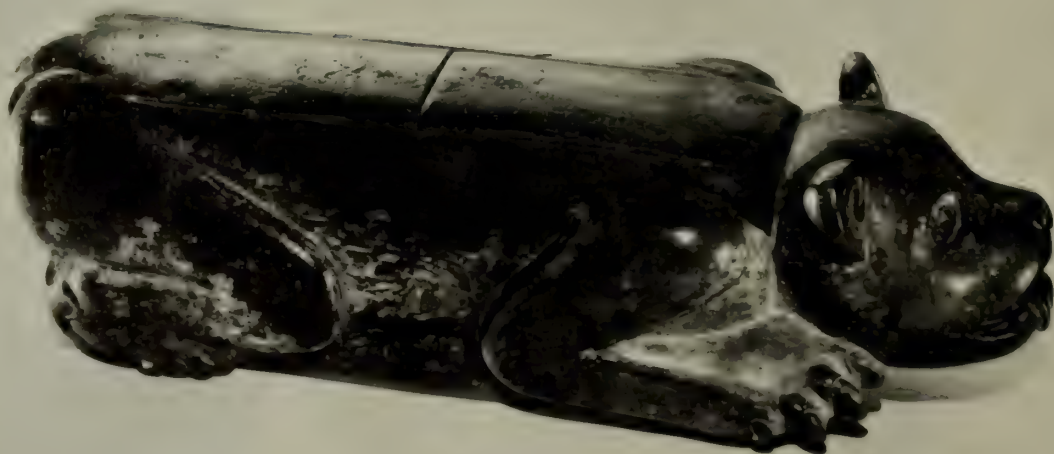
That masks were extremely important in ancient Mexico and Central America is evident from the abundance of those made from stone or clay which have been found. Most of the masks that were actually used in ceremonies were probably made of wood or other perishable materials and thus have not been preserved. It seems likely that the prominent role of the mask led to its becoming a subject for sculpture in stone as well. This one, for instance, with unperforated eyes, could not be used as a mask, although it is mask-like in form. For this reason it has been suggested that these stone masks should be called "face plaques." It is thought that they may have been designed for attachment to a bundled-up body at the time of burial, although there is no convincing evidence for this.

Mask. Aztec style. From vicinity of Castillo de Teayo, Vera Cruz. Height 7¼ inches.



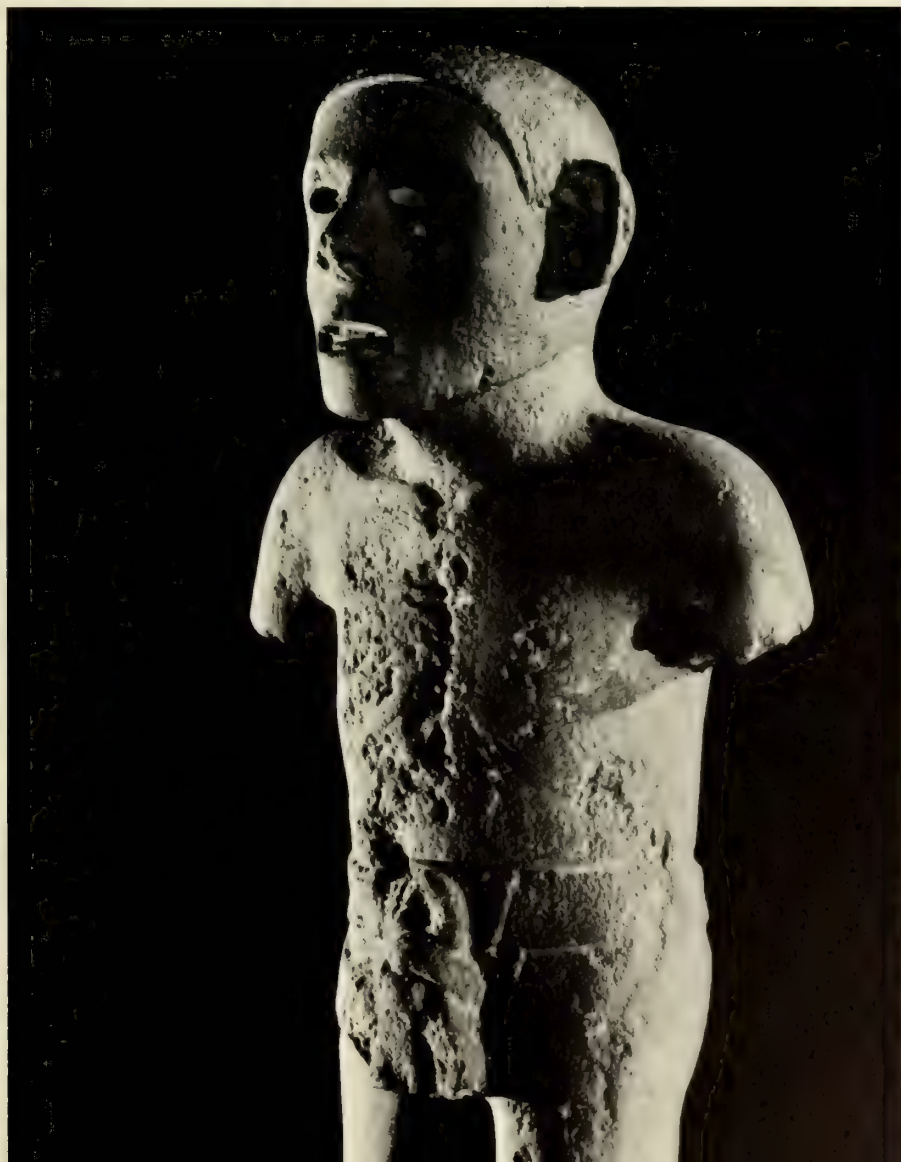
Known as a *Teponaztli* in the Náhuatl language of the Aztec, this drum and others like it survived from Aztec times to the present in Indian villages where they were used in ceremonies and regarded as sacred village property. They are two-toned instruments with two tongues of wood formed by cuts along the top of a hollowed log. Made of heavy, dense hardwoods, they have good resonant qualities. The carved decorations of these drums present a wide range of forms and motifs in Aztec and Mixtec style. This one depicts a crouching jaguar. It originally had protruding fangs in its upper and lower jaws, and the eyes were undoubtedly inset with another material.

Wooden drum. Aztec period. Length 25 inches.



The major sculpture of metropolitan Tenochtitlán, once the Aztec capital and now Mexico City, is noted for its overwhelming religious symbolism and its powerful monumentality, designed undoubtedly to impress the beholder with the supernatural forces of life that controlled his destiny. In surprising contrast to this are a number of simple and often realistically presented small sculptures of persons and animals. This figure of a man carved in red porous lava is considered to represent a *macehual*, a common man. Aztec society was rigidly stratified into distinct classes, the largest of which, of course, was composed of workers. Although there was some provision for upward mobility through military achievement, workers were generally destined to remain in their class. Such an interpretation of this sculpture, while speculative in part, is evoked by the character of the piece.

Figure of red volcanic stone. Aztec style. Height 21½ inches.



THE PYRAMID OF THE NICHES AT TAJIN.



CENTRAL VERA CRUZ

Very long and narrow and covering most of the Gulf Coast lands of Mexico, the state of Vera Cruz encompasses the Huasteca region in the north, and the Olmec region in the south. The entire state, however, is extremely rich in archeological sites; well over a thousand have so far been located. The most important and impressive site in the central portions is Tajín, a large ceremonial complex with many pyramid structures, including the well-known and unique pyramid with recessed niches along its stepped levels. Numerous relief carvings based on elaborate volutes or scrolls interlaced in a complex manner have also been found here. These constitute the principal feature of what is referred to as the Tajín, or Classic Central Vera Cruz style. Some of the best examples of this relief carving are found near the so-called "Pyramid of Niches" on the walls of two ball-courts — enclosed areas in which a game employing a heavy rubber ball was played. Although ball-courts and the ball-game are found nearly everywhere in Middle America, central Vera Cruz appears to have been a special focus of its development. The special kinds of carved stones that seem to be connected with the ball-game are found most abundantly in this specific region. As far as is known, the game was a team sport played by opposing groups of perhaps 10 players each. The courts were of varying size. Striking the ball back and forth and gaining points, the players hit the

extremely resilient rubber ball not with hands but with a kind of yoke they wore on the hips. Many stone yokes have been found in the Vera Cruz region.

Inland from the city of Vera Cruz is a sub-region of Central Vera Cruz known especially for the quantities of fine clay sculpture and pottery that have come from its many sites. The clay sculpture is fashioned in what is known as the Las Remojadas style, the name taken from one of the sites where numerous examples of the type were first found. Little is known of the evolution of the Las Remojadas style, but it extends from Pre-Classic times up to the Spanish Conquest. There are human and animal figures of many kinds, the best known perhaps, being the smiling face figures, one of the few expressions of humor in Middle American art. Las Remojadas sculpture features simple body and face painting with a coal black resin paint that provides a curious contrast with the otherwise uniformly tan colored clay.

That the peoples of Central Vera Cruz were in contact with various parts of Middle America in all periods is indicated by the great variety of pottery styles that occur, often showing relationships in form or decoration to distant places. Ultimately, Central Vera Cruz played an important role in the history of Middle America as both an innovative center and as a region through which many streams of cultural influence flowed.

The motif of a human head within the jaws of an animal or bird is widely found in Middle America. Its meanings are not easily defined, but it is certainly a part of the close association that man feels with the animals who surround him, a belief shared by American Indians in past times and by primitive peoples the world over. Most of the Middle American deities were conceived as having animal attributes, and the ritual costumes of priests and warriors commonly included helmets or headdresses of animal form. A fragment of what was probably a full human figure, this face of a man within the jaws of a coyote is a particularly fine sculptural expression of the man-animal theme.

Human head in mouth of jaguar, ceramic. Las Remojadas style, Vera Cruz. Height 9 inches.





Known as palmas or palmate stones because of their palm-leaf shape, these graceful sculptures appear to have been ritual objects that were carried in front of the body with their concave base resting on a thick belt. On both the front (shown here in a mirrored image) and the back this palma has intricate relief carving of the Classic Vera Cruz style. On the back are two figures, perhaps anthropomorphic animal deities with their heads tipped backward and with stream-like forms emerging from their mouths. Palmate stones have a limited distribution in Central Vera Cruz, but they show a great variation in their sculptured or relief ornamentation.

Stone palma. Classic Central Vera Cruz style. Height 25¾ inches.



Intricately carved designs appear on both sides of this tall and particularly graceful palmate stone. On the front, presented in this view, a face in profile occupies the central space while interlaced scrolls cover the remainder of the surface. This kind of intricate interweaving of human or animal forms with abstract scroll-work occurs in great variety in the Classic Vera Cruz style. The interlaced patterns show a great similarity with designs on the bronzes and jades of the Shang and Chou dynasties of early China, a fact that has occasioned much speculation over the possibility that the two cultures may be related.

Stone palma. Classic Central Vera Cruz style. Height 18¼ inches.



The interior of this large, flat-bottomed tripod bowl is spectacularly painted with a dragon-like serpent with wide-open jaws—an unusual motif on pottery. The closest comparable examples are so-called “sky dragons” of the Toltec influenced art of Chichen Itza. The painting is in black, orange, red and white on a cream-colored surface. Only a few examples of this particular type of polychrome pottery are known, and all are reported from the vicinity of the Tuxtlas, two towns in south central Vera Cruz. Although within the region of the early Olmec, this variety of pottery is of the much later Post Classic Period.

Large flat bowl with “dragon” motif. Probably from near Los Tuxtlas, Vera Cruz. Diameter 13½ inches.



Of the many varieties of fine pottery that have been found in the Central Gulf Coast region, none can compare with this superb bowl of delicate thinness and graceful hemispherical form. Made of very fine white clay, it has a design of lobsters (seen in a mirror) and long-legged wading birds painted in shades of brown on a cream-colored surface. The general form and features of the animals are deftly highlighted by a few simple incised lines.

Ceramic bowl with aquatic motifs, Vera Cruz. Diameter 7¼ inches.



This seated figure is an unusually expressive example of Las Remojadas style clay sculpture. The lids of the large eyes are carefully depicted; the nose is recurved, and the partly opened mouth shows the teeth filed away, leaving only portions of the central incisors intact. Tooth mutilation of various kinds was a widespread custom in Middle America. Clothed in a skirt and a cape-like garment with a point in front—like the *quixquemilt* worn by modern Mexican Indian women—the figure is probably a female, despite the lack of any indication of breasts.

Ceramic figure. Las Remojadas style, Vera Cruz. Height 8 inches.

A number of small ceramic wheeled animals of this kind have been found in Vera Cruz and other regions of Mexico and in El Salvador. The axles have in all cases disappeared but they were undoubtedly made of wood. Apparently represented here is a young deer, while other examples show jaguars, dogs or coyotes. This figure, like others, has a whistle in the back above the tail.

The occurrence of these wheeled animals is extraordinary, for the use of wheeled vehicles was otherwise completely unknown in the New World. They have been explained as an independent invention of the principle of the wheel. But it appears more likely that they are the result of influences from the civilizations of Asia, where small wheeled animals very similar to these were widespread in ancient times.

Ceramic wheeled animal. Las Remojadas style, Vera Cruz. Length 7¾ inches.



The elaborate costume shown in this well-preserved little figurine probably represents the trappings of a man dressed for a religious ceremonial. The costume was probably constructed of light materials—wood, feathers, paper or cloth. The tall headdress was most likely made of feathers arranged along a shaft; the large rosettes at each side were perhaps of folded paper. More interesting, because they are unusual, are the hangings on each side, which seem to show a technique of cutting through a thin material and allowing the flap to hang down, producing a symmetrical design. An elaborate collar, a fancy belt, and a skirt or breech cloth complete the costume.

Ceramic figure with tall headdress. Las Remojadas style, Vera Cruz. Height 8 inches.

Ceramic stamps are widely known in Middle America although they are not common in the region of Central Vera Cruz where this unusually large and elegant example was probably made. The identity of the subject is uncertain, but it may be a pelican or other aquatic bird. The use of such stamps is unknown; they may have been employed in imprinting designs on textiles or on the body.

Ceramic stamp, Vera Cruz. Height 4½ inches.





This sculpture is known as a small yoke or knee yoke because of its U-shape and the possibility that, like the large Vera Cruz yokes, it may have been used in the ball game. There is no evidence, however, of the precise function stones of this shape may have had. Somewhat different examples occur in early Pre-Classical horizons in Central Mexico and are often carved in pure Olmec style. The piece shown here has Olmec characteristics but is not clearly identifiable as to style or place of origin. The back portion is broken away, but it is known from other examples that originally it was as long as the front. The face is modelled with great subtlety and there are also lightly incised designs—the figure of a man, a large head, and what appears to be a reclining deer—which are not easily seen. The incising of the surface of a sculpture with designs not related to it is a feature found repeatedly in Olmec objects.

U-shaped stone with face in relief. Height 5½ inches.



Known by the Spanish word *hacha* (axe) because of their thinness and general resemblance to axes, stone *hachas* are usually designed in the form of a head. On the basis of figurines and relief sculptures, it has been suggested that *hachas* were made to be fastened to a yoke-like belt to be used in some way in the ball-game. This hypothesis is borne out by the pottery vessel shown on the left that has an identical *hacha* positioned on a yoke form. These two objects, the stone *hacha* and the pottery vessel, were said to have been found together at a site in Central Vera Cruz. *Hachas* occur in great variety in Vera Cruz; in slightly different forms they are found in Chiapas and Guatemala and as far away as the southern Maya area of Honduras and El Salvador.

Ceramic vessel in form of yoke with attached hacha, and stone hacha. Vera Cruz.





This is an excellent example of a distinctive type of ceramic sculpture that comes from the region of the town of Nopiloa in central Vera Cruz. The figures are mold-made, very thin and light in weight, and covered with a cream-colored slip. In this case the basic molded figure is loaded with an extraordinary elaboration of hand modeled fittings undoubtedly depicting a ritual costume. The headdress includes a water bird whose wings incorporate stylized dragons; the tail of the bird is missing, but it probably rose as a fan-like projection at the back of the headdress. Stylized wings are attached to the figure's head and project from each side; a great collar hangs on the chest, and excessively long ornaments project from the ears.

Ceramic figure with elaborate headdress. Nopiloa, Vera Cruz. Height 10¼ inches.

Traditionally known as yokes because of their general resemblance to ox or horse collars, these curious stone carvings are one of the most enigmatic classes of archaeological objects found in Middle America. Although opinions vary, the best explanation of their use appears to be that they were worn as belts in the ball-game or that they were ceremonial replicas of wooden belts that were so used.

Many yokes have the general form seen here, representing a frog or toad with a broad toothless mouth on the curved portion, its legs appearing along each side. Beautifully cut interlace designs of the Classic Vera Cruz style appear on the top and sides of the yoke as well as on the interior surfaces. Highly stylized human heads in profile are carved in low relief on the ends. Silhouetted photographs of the heads from this yoke appear on the opposite page.

Carved stone yoke, Vera Cruz. Length 16¼ inches.



Within the larger tradition of clay sculpture that has been identified as the Las Remojadas style there are a number of substyles or local varieties. One of these features an especially realistic portrayal of human beings with a minimum of costuming or other details and is well represented by this remarkable work. The face is portrait-like with little, if any, feeling of stylization. The body is fully revealed, though completely covered as if by a blanket. One can only think that the sculptor was motivated by a strongly humanist point of view—an attitude usually not apparent in Middle American art.

Ceramic figure. Las Remojadas style, Vera Cruz. Height 11 inches.



THE HUASTECA

The Huasteca was the most northeastern regional outpost of Middle American civilization and appears to have had a distinct cultural existence for about 3,000 years — from early Pre-Classic times to the Spanish Conquest. The Huastec language belongs to the great Maya stock and is the only outsider from the massed group of Maya languages of southern Mexico and Guatemala. It is thought that Maya languages may have been distributed along the Gulf Coast in Pre-Classic times and that the Huastec was pinched off by other groups moving in and separating it from the main body of the Maya. This would have happened in Pre-Classic times, for the Huastec did not share in the elaboration of Maya culture of the Classic Period.

Stratigraphic excavations underlying the town of Pánuco on the banks of the Pánuco River have served to establish a sequence of ten cultural horizons showing a continuing evolution of ceramic and figurine types. This provides what is only an historical outline of the history of the region, and much is still to be learned concerning the cultures of the various horizons. There are only hints, for instance, that the round temple structures, which are abundant and well known for the Post-Classic Period, occur here as early as the Late Pre-Classic. Very distinctive forms of stone sculp-

ture can also be identified as belonging to the Post-Classic Period, but there is no indication of when this important trait first appeared. Round buildings are associated in Middle America with the cult of Quetzalcóatl, and many of the stone sculptures of the Huasteca definitely depict this deity — one of the great gods of the Aztec pantheon. It is thought that the concept of Quetzalcóatl was first developed in the Huasteca and subsequently taken over by the Toltec and Aztec peoples of Central Mexico. Nevertheless, the early historical accounts credit the Aztec with thinking of the Huastec as somewhat primitive and uncivilized. They had to admit also that the Huastec were fierce and clever warriors for the Aztec were never successful in their attempts to conquer them and bring them into their tribute empire.



The art of creating small clay figurines was probably more extensively practiced in Middle America than in any other part of the world. It provides a very special and intimate view of how the ancient people saw themselves. This is notably true of the Huasteca, where fine clay figurines are especially abundant. Interesting hand-modeled kinds continued in use through the Classic Period and even later. In Central Mexico, the use of molds appeared in the Classic Period.

These three figures speak for themselves. Like a large proportion of all Huastec and other Middle American figurines, they are females, with their sexual features strongly emphasized. This characteristic suggests that the figurines were part of a fertility cult—not only fertility in human beings but in plants and animals as well.

Ceramic figurines. Huasteca from near Panuco, Vera Cruz. Height of center figure 3¼ inches.

This arresting effigy vessel was sculpted and painted with accurate observation and humor. Typical of late Huastec pottery in its stirrup-spout form and bold, decoration, it is unusual in depicting a wild pig, possibly the javelina or collared peccary. An amusing touch is the collar, which supports a chest ornament similar to what might have been worn by a Huasteca man. The painted decoration suggests hair patterns of wild pigs. The white neck band and gorget may represent the collar from which the collared peccary gets its name.

Especially interesting in this sculpture is the artisan's attempt to achieve an illusion of depth with cross-hatching on the flanks and a dark spot in the ears. The pig's features, collar and chest ornament were emphasized with deep cuts; some are filled with paint, some are left undecorated. The combination of techniques makes this a most unusual creation.

Ceramic vessel in form of peccary. Huastec. Height 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches.



GUERRERO

The area of the State of Guerrero is extremely rich in archeological remains and has been the source of innumerable fine objects that have found their way into museums and private collections the world over. At the same time Guerrero has been subject to little scientific investigation and is archeologically the least known of Mexico's regions.

It is difficult to characterize Guerrero's role in Middle American history. Although occupied from early times and, in the more favorable sections, with large populations, there are few architectural remains of any size; known materials are mainly small stone sculptures. There are local styles, but many pieces are also derivative of cultures in other regions. Many small objects of jade and serpentine in the purest Olmec style have been found. These were numerous enough for Miguel Covarrubias, the great Mexican artist and historian, to have suggested that Guerrero may have been the place where the Olmec culture originated. Strong influence is also clearly apparent in numbers of stone masks of unadulterated Teotihuacán style. It might be assumed that they all came from Teotihuacán itself except that very few have been found at that site; most of those known are from Guerrero.

The best known of the local Guerrero styles is Mezcala, taking its name from a town on the Balsas River where the highway from Mexico

City to Acapulco crosses and where these objects have been primarily found. Most characteristic of the Mezcala style are figures like celts or stone axes, forms simply but subtly worked to represent a human figure while still retaining a basic axe-like shape. These sculptures range from a celt with the barest suggestion of human features to those which retain little of the celt form.

Mezcala stone sculpture also occurs in many other forms: seated figures, various animals, serpents, frogs and monster forms. Of much interest are small stylized replicas of temples and many purely abstract forms, perforated and supposedly used as pendants.

Because of the present lack of knowledge concerning the association of specific objects in the graves of Guerrero, the dating of the Mezcala style is uncertain. Olmec objects are perhaps as early as 1000 B.C., and those related to Teotihuacán fall into the first 500 years A.D. Those of Mezcala probably occur somewhere in between, having some connection with the latest Olmec horizons and continuing into the time of Classic Period Teotihuacán.

Small double figures joined at the back are not uncommon among the great numbers and variety of Mezcala stone carvings, but no others of this size, with its curiously curving and asymmetric crest, are known. The features of the face are depicted with straight-line cuts in the typical Mezcala manner, but the limbs are more fully modeled than usual. Unfortunately, nothing is known of the meaning of such back to back figures among the ancient people of Guerrero.

Green stone double figure. Mezcala style, Guerrero. Height 9 inches.





The origin of this unusual sculpture in hard volcanic stone is unknown, and its attribution to Guerrero is based entirely on the style of the face. Its mask-like character and the lack of any delineation of the eyes suggests that it belongs with the Mezcala style objects of the upper Balsas River region.

Boulder sculpture with mask-like relief. Mezcala style, Guerrero. Height 10 inches.



A PORTION OF THE GREAT PLAZA AT MONTE ALBAN.



OAXACA

Oaxaca played an important role in the history of Middle America. It was a major culture center early in Pre-Classic times and continued as such without a break up to the time of the Spanish Conquest. Strategically situated near the Olmec region, and between the Highland and Lowland Maya regions to the southeast and Central Mexico to the northwest, it both received and transmitted cultural influences moving in all directions.

The major center of cultural growth in Oaxaca was in the broader valleys in which the present city of Oaxaca lies, the remainder of the state being extremely mountainous and unsuitable for larger permanent settlements of agricultural peoples. The best known of the many archaeological sites in this vicinity is the great site of Monte Albán, just west of the city of Oaxaca. There a large mountain-top was leveled; today its many large

pyramid temples and great plazas comprise one of the most impressive ancient ruins in Middle America. Monte Albán, like Mitla, another famous but quite different site thirty miles east of the city of Oaxaca, was occupied at different times by both Zapotec and Mixtec peoples, these being the names of the two most important languages of the Indians of Oaxaca.

Research now in progress is serving to define earlier stages, but the main archeological sequence for Oaxaca is that revealed in long-term excavations by Mexican archaeologists at Monte Albán. The sequence comprises five major periods — Monte Albán I to Monte Albán V. From Period I through Period IV a definite continuity is seen at Monte Albán. A distinctive gray colored pottery continues throughout this time, even though there were changes in form and decoration. Funerary urns, also gray in color, continue for an equally long time, and, much to the delight of archaeologists, the building of large room-like tombs for the important dead was a persistent trait. The major building period was in Classic times (Period III) when the occupants were undoubtedly Zapotecs. After that, time decadence set in.

It is possible that Monte Albán was largely deserted after about 1200 A.D., but Mixtec peoples with a quite distinct culture used parts of the site for burials. One that has been discovered is Tomb No. 7, where earlier remains were pushed aside to make room for the sumptuous burial of what must have been a most important person. Quantities of gold objects and many of jade and other semi-precious stones were included as burial furnishings — perhaps the richest burial ever found by archaeologists in the New World.

These kinds of objects as well as elaborate polychrome pottery are characteristic of the Mixtec in Post Classic times. In their smaller mountain valleys in the northwest, they seem not to have been affected by the general decay that struck the major centers of Classic Period culture. They maintained their skills, learned the art of metallurgy that somehow diffused up from the south, and became Mexico's great center of art and learning. Mixtec artisans and scholars undoubtedly contributed greatly to the elaboration of Aztec culture in later times, before the conquest by Cortes.

If this head is an accurate measure of the size of the funerary urn it once topped, the complete figure would have been about life size and therefore unusually large. It is from central Oaxaca and dates from about 500 A.D. The head is notable for its prominent eyebrows and the grotesque mask with a trunk-like appendage covering the lower face. Decorating the front of the headdress is a row of standing ears of corn, obviously molded from actual corn. Urns of this period are usually composed of mold-made elements joined and then fired as a single ceramic piece. The deity represented in this imposing fragment is unidentified.

Head portion of large ceramic urn. Oaxaca. Height 16¼ inches.



From near Miahuatlán in southern Oaxaca, this vessel with attached standing figure is an exceptional example of Mixtec polychrome, a pottery style common to the whole Mixtec region in Post Classic times. Beautifully made and multi-colored, Mixtec polychrome is sometimes decorated with painted figures and scenes in a style identical to that of the ancient codices, or picture-written books. The finest of those in all of Mexico are also from this Mixtec region. This sophisticated vessel may be unique in having a figure modeled in the round attached to it. The deity represented is Macuiloxochitl, the god of dancing, games and feasting, identifiable by the characteristic painted band surrounding his mouth.

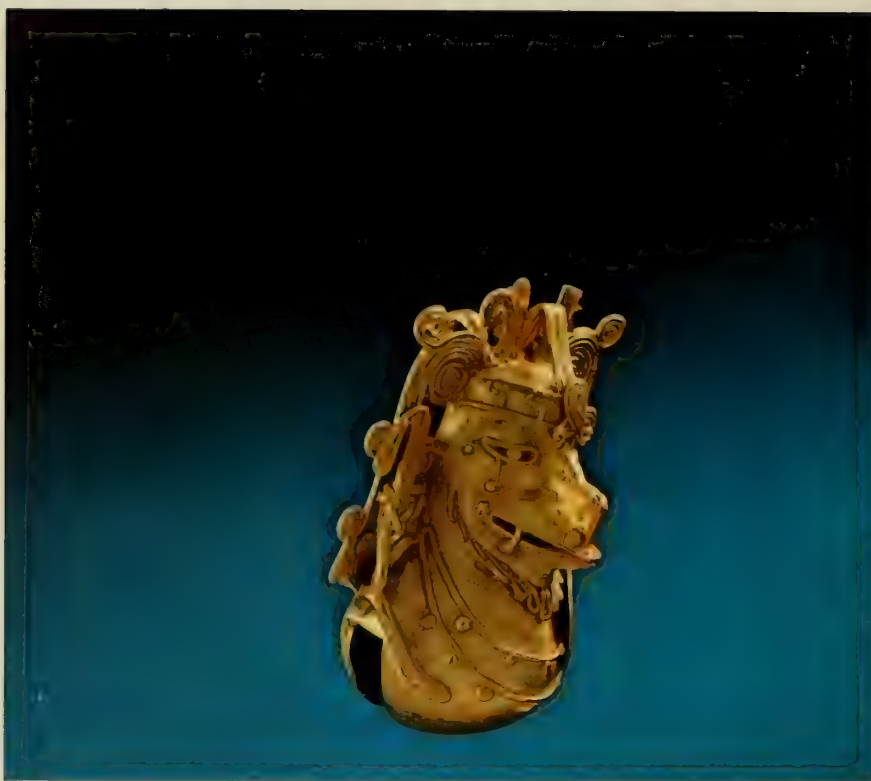
Ceramic jar with attached figure, Mixtec. Miahuatlán, Oaxaca. Height 13 inches.



This is an unusual but attractive example of the ceramic funerary urns characteristic of the cultures of Oaxaca. Found mainly in tombs, they consist usually of a cylindrical vessel with the figure of a deity variously molded on the front. Perhaps they contained offerings to the dead. Funerary urns were made in Oaxaca as early as about 600 B.C., and continued in use until the 16th century. The deities represented can often be identified by their attire and other symbolic devices. The most common is the god known by the Zapotecs as Cocijo, an equivalent of the rain god, Tlaloc, a major Aztec deity. An unknown goddess is represented in this urn. It is believed to be from about 300 A.D.

Ceramic funerary urn. Oaxaca. Height 8¾ inches.





Bells are the most common of all metal objects in Mexico, but few are as beautifully elaborated as this example in gold. It is said to have come from a place in Vera Cruz near the Oaxaca border, although it was quite probably made by Mixtec artisans in western Oaxaca. It represents Xólotl, defined as the twin brother or variant of Quetzalcóatl and often shown as he is here with the head of a dog. Xólotl carries a shield and spears in his left hand and an atlatl or spear-thrower in his right. His beard is neatly depicted, sharp fangs protrude from his mouth, and a single tear comes from each eye. In the lost wax process by which this bell was made, the entire object was first constructed of wax; the model was then invested in a clay and charcoal mold, the wax heated and allowed to run out, and molten gold poured in to take its place.

Gold bell, Mixtec. Height 2 inches.

The spectacular skills and artistic virtuosity of the Mixtec gold workers are readily apparent in this labret or lip-plug sculptured in the form of a serpent. A work of this superb quality must have been worn by an exceptionally important personage. If so, he cannot have been too comfortable considering the weight of this heavy ornament which was inserted through a perforation in his lower lip. The object is cast by the lost wax or wax model process, ingeniously crafted so that the forked tongue of the labret is left to move freely as a separate element between the jaws of the creature. The serpent that is represented is of great importance in late Mexican iconography. Exactly where this piece was found is unknown. It could have been of Aztec origin, for the Mixtec were the mentors of the Aztec goldsmiths.

Gold lip plug, Mixtec. Height 2¾ inches.



THE MAYA

Because of their artistic and intellectual achievement, the Maya are considered to represent the peak of cultural development not only in Middle America but in the New World as a whole. Their cities, now covered by forests, reveal a distinguished and innovative architecture, including the only large buildings in the Americas with vaulted stone roofs. The Maya were also accomplished astronomers and mathematicians. They were capable of calculating and recording the movements of heavenly bodies and did so in connection with a complex calendrical system of their own devising. The advanced form of hieroglyphic writing that they evolved was unique. In the arts, the Maya are noted for their noble sculpture in stone and stucco. They were unequalled in mural and vase painting, and made distinctive contributions in other minor arts. Maya art concerned itself primarily with the personages, deities and esoteric canons of their religiously oriented society. Their style is elaborate and complex, based on sensuous line and a decorative urge to fill all available space with design. Not their least achievement was that they handled the human figure in the most realistic, varied, and graceful manner known in Middle American art.

These distinguished achievements are confined primarily to the Maya of the central lowland rain forest region of the department of El Peten in

northern Guatemala and contiguous areas of Mexico, Honduras, and British Honduras. This is only one of three divisions of the large area occupied by the Maya. That to the south, known as the Highland or Southern Maya division, comprises the whole highland region of Guatemala and of the state of Chiapas, Mexico, where many Maya-speaking people still live. The rich site of Kaminaljuyú and others in this region show a long sequence of cultures of the Pre-Classic period, and it is suspected that many of the more advanced elements of Classic Maya culture of the central region may have had their origins here. A less distinctive third division of the Maya area is that of the relatively dry portions of the northern part of the Yucatan peninsula. During the Classic Period this division shared the elaborate culture of the central division, but it had a greater importance in Post-Classic times when Toltec influence from Central Mexico greatly modified the local traditions.

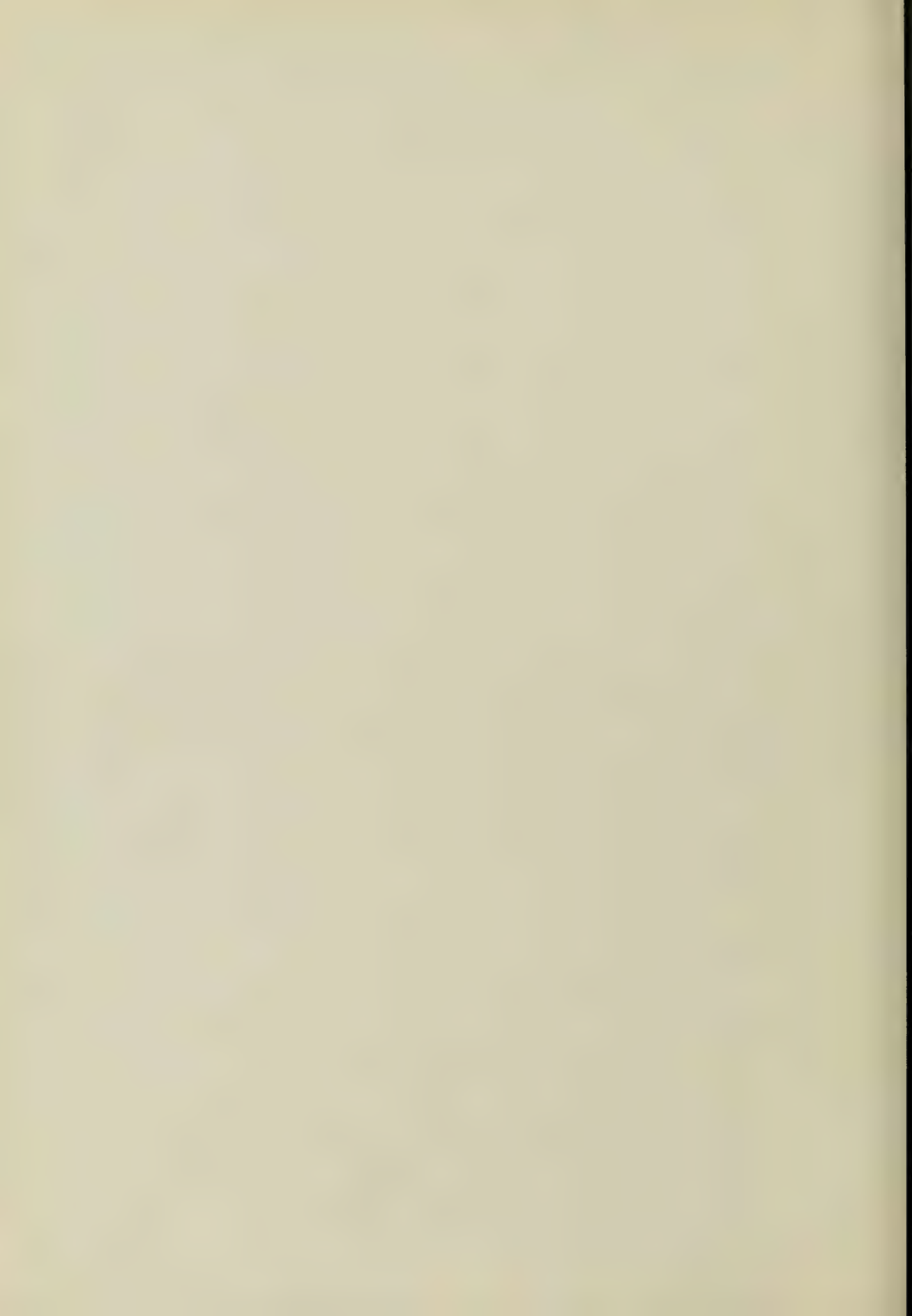
The concept of the Classic Period in Middle American archaeology has come primarily from studies of the Maya. Scores of Maya cities in the central region were datable by means of the hieroglyphic inscriptions on their monumental stelae. These inscriptions mark a period of about 600 years with complete accuracy. A major problem has been that of fixing this block of time in relation to the Christian calendar, but it now appears fairly certain that the earliest dated monument is of the year 279 A.D. and that the period runs to about 900 A.D. The great period of Maya civilization did not begin precisely on this earlier date, to be sure, nor did it end on the latter, but the rise of the major cities certainly occurred within that span. At the end, each of these cities was deserted. Unfortunately, the reasons are still unknown. Why such a great surge of cultural development should have been cut off in this way, is one of the most intriguing problems of Maya archaeology.

Yucatán peninsula. During the Classic Period this division shared the

OVERLEAF: A VIEW OF THE PYRAMID OF THE INSCRIPTIONS AT TIKAL, GUATEMALA.







Such deeply carved vessels of a type called "Slateware" are found throughout the lowland Maya area and date from late Classic times. This bowl is most unusual in its cartoon-like representation of a seated man painting the face of a seated woman. He pursues his efforts with great concentration while she, holding what is most likely a dish of paint before him, leans forward to aid his efforts. The figures wear typical Mayan accouterments—earplugs, bead necklaces and bracelets—and their hair is dressed in familiar styles. The woman has spiral motifs on her arm and leg; the man shows circular forms on his arms, perhaps indicating tattooing or painting. The artist's brush is amazingly similar to modern paint brushes, and appears to have bristles set in a shaft. On the back of the pot is a diagonal row of carved glyphs typical of such vessels.

Ceramic bowl with carved design. Height 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches.





Only a very few Maya jades of this impressive size and outstanding quality are known. Made of the fine emerald-green jade favored by the Maya, this piece was further enriched by carving the relief design to varying planes in order to expose its areas of deepest green. Provision for its use as a pendant was made by a perforation through the entire width of the plaque which is about a half inch in thickness. The large central figure is shown seated with legs crossed in the Maya style. Small dwarf-like figures, a feature frequently found in the art of this area, are seated at either side of him. His animated gestures give the impression that he is speaking.

Carved plaque of green jade. Maya. Height 6¾ inches.

This beautiful tall vase—a masterpiece of Maya painting—is from the Late Classic Period of the lowlands of Guatemala where the pictorial art of the Maya reached a peak of excellence unequalled in the New World. In this tableau an event of importance is no doubt being commemorated, a significant meeting or confrontation. A view of the entire scene that encircles the vessel can be read from the photographs. At the right, separated by a panel of glyphs, are the two principal figures. The one on the left, distinguished by a voluminous jaguar headdress, kneels in an attitude of deference, subjection, or greeting, before an imperious figure in an imposing headdress. Behind the kneeling figure are two attendants, one of whom wears a pendant in the form of a fish. Particularly noteworthy is the portrait-like detailing of the faces.

Polychrome pottery vessel, four views. Late Classic Maya style. Guatemala. Height 8¼ inches.





Above left:

Graceful vases, with curved or straight sides and painted with realistic figures, are typical of lowland Maya art of the late Classic period. This one shows a spectacular headdress. It appears to be composed of long feathers and a bunch of fluffy plumes mounted at the end of a long quill extending from the front of the head. The painting portrays an idealized Maya type, stocky and corpulent. The ring of glyphs around the top is more decorative than meaningful. The inside rim is painted to match the outside, and a series of long brush strokes carry the color into the interior, an effective technique typical of many of these vessels.

Polychrome pottery vessel. Late Classic Maya style. Height 6¾ inches.

Above right:

On a raised dais sits a priest or dignitary in a typical cross-legged pose; he seems to be addressing someone. His mask is similar to depictions of the Maya long-nosed god, though no definite attribution can be made. The headdress is built of elaborate and lengthy plume-like shapes, which may be decorative exaggerations of a real type. He has a beaded necklace and appears to have a tattooed or painted figure on his upper arms and thighs. Around his waist is an elaborate tie, and he wears ribbed bracelets. A most unusual feature of this vase is the extensive use of blue color—often found on Maya figurines but infrequently seen in vase paintings.

Polychrome pottery vessel. Late Classic Maya style. Height 6½ inches.

Large ceramic sculptures of this kind built around vertical tubular forms have come from the region of the Classic Period site of Palenque in Chiapas and in neighboring Tabasco. Although their use is unknown, they stood in some instances at least on the terraces of pyramid structures. Perhaps they were merely ornamental, but there is some reason for thinking that they may have been stands for incense burners. Most often they are in the form of superimposed masks, but this one has an unusual motif, a man standing on the back of a turtle. He is clothed with sandals, fringed belt and breech cloth, and a small poncho with cut-out geometric designs. Over his shoulders hangs a shell pendant. A tablet-like object, apparently not a shield, is held in the left hand. The lateral panels have standing animal-headed figures holding staffs or spears. The significance of the turtle on which the figure stands is not known, but these animals are often depicted in Maya art.

Ceramic tubular sculpture. Maya. Height 23 inches.



Right:

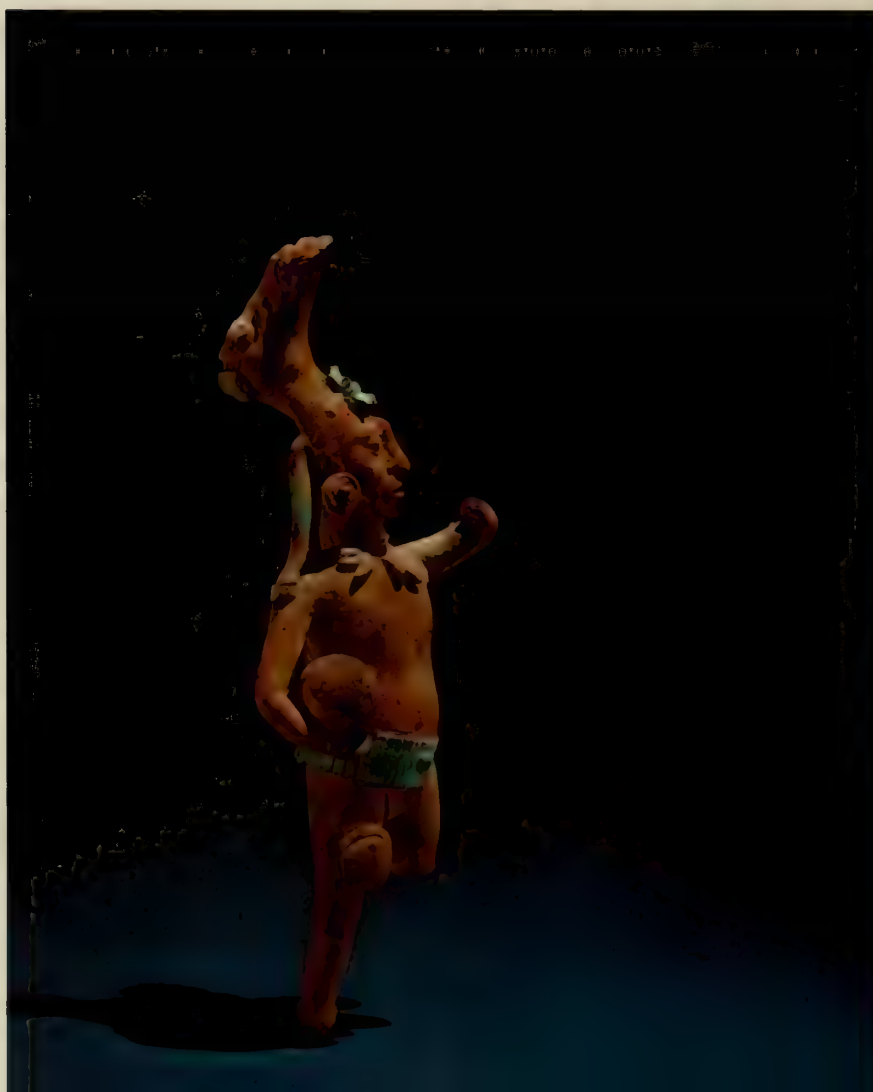
This majestic figure, somewhat larger than usual and said to be from a site on the Campeche coast, represents the Maya physical ideal—the deformed head, nose extended to the forehead, and crescent, crossed eyes. This is a dignitary of some sort, wearing a vest-like garment and a large ornament. His hair has been elaborately dressed, and he wears a peaked hat with a circular creased fan: the upper part of the hat is removable.

Ceramic sculpture of seated figure. Maya, Jaina style. Height 11 inches. Gift of Mr. Ernest Erickson.

Below:

While other representations of ball players occur in Maya art, this large hand-modeled figurine, most likely from the island of Jaina on the coast of Campeche, is most unusual because he is shown holding the ball used in the game. It was made of solid rubber and must have weighed a good deal. Around his waist this player wears an efficient-looking hipguard, very likely made of slats of wood, and a knee protector with decorative tassels. He also wears an animal headdress, probably a deer. The expressive and portrait-like face is typical of hand-modeled Jaina figures, as is the grace and naturalism of his pose.

Ceramic figure of ball-player. Maya, Jaina style. Height 9¾ inches.





COSTA RICA and PANAMA

The Pre-Columbian peoples of this southern portion of the isthmus connecting the two American continents were linguistically related to those of South America. As such, they lay outside the boundaries of the area of Middle American civilization — except for an intrusive tongue of northern migrants that occupied the Pacific coastal portion of Costa Rica. This was the pattern in late times and indicates little of the more complex history of migration and the movement of cultural influences that will undoubtedly be revealed when there is more systematic archaeological research in the area.

Except for simple house platforms, stone architecture is absent in Costa Rica and Panama. This appears to be the logical result of a lack in the area of large political units; small chieftainships appear instead to have been the rule. Notable developments of stone sculpture are found in some regions, however, as well as many varieties of pottery, of jade and other stone carvings, and of gold ornaments. These smaller objects have been found in great abundance and show strongly developed local styles. However, widespread trade also apparently took place throughout the region. Some pottery styles emphasize elaborate modeled ornamentation, including tall tripod supports on some vessels which take the form of fish, alliga-

tors or other animals. Often the entire vessel is shaped as an effigy of an animal, human, or monster combination. Other pottery styles display an emphasis on painted decoration. The Coclé style of Panama, for example, is outstanding in the number and brilliance of the colors used in its manufacture and surface decoration. Carved jade ornaments are especially important in the northwestern portions of Costa Rica. In this area, certain of the forms carved in jade as well as the quality of the stone itself point to an affiliation with the Olmec culture of Mexico.

The gold ornaments for which Costa Rica and Panama are especially noted were first seen by the early Spaniards in possession of native chiefs. Since then, quite naturally, they have been searched out with diligence for their value and beauty. They are found in considerable abundance in the graves of some regions. The objects occur in an astonishing variety of animal forms including birds, monkeys, frogs, and fish. They also occur in human or human-animal combinations. Most of the golden artifacts were cast by the lost-wax or wax model process and indicate highly-developed skills in this delicate craft. The art of gold working in Costa Rica evidently came from the south — Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru — but the date of its introduction is as yet unknown.

Birds are a common subject in Costa Rican jades. The pendant at the left appears to show a long-beaked tropical bird, but it is stylized and exaggerated so that it is nearly unrecognizable. Its wings are folded to meet at the front; other features are indicated by simple straight cuts. The unusual large pendant on the right may have been thought of as a spread-winged bird, but the triangular face at its center is the only recognizable attribute in what is otherwise a purely abstract form.

Both pendants are of a blue-green jade with white spots, identical in most respects to the finest jade used by the Olmec. It is possible that the jade used in both regions came from the same source, but there is no knowledge of where this could have been. The workmanship is excellent, and the remarkable surface finish and polish of these fine jades is especially notable.

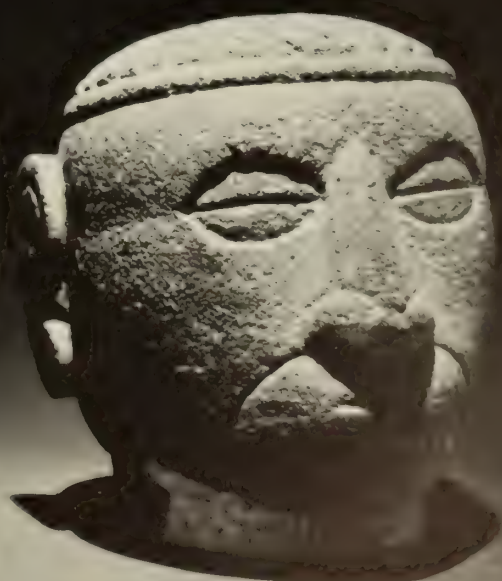
Bird pendants of blue-green jade. Costa Rica. Width of right pendant 6 inches. Gifts of Mr. Ernest Erickson.





Heads as complete sculptures without bodies are not uncommon in Costa Rica. They are either modeled in pottery or cut from lava stone, like these examples from the highlands. It is impossible to know the significance of the form: they could have been meant as portraits of deceased persons, as replicas of trophy heads or perhaps as symbols of death. Certainly the Costa Rican artists were fascinated with heads; many of the more complete sculptures show men with trophy heads hung over their shoulders on cords or a man with a knife in one hand and a head in the other. The idea of portraying isolated heads occurs in many other regions as well. The colossal stone heads of the Olmec are perhaps best known.

Stone heads. Costa Rica. Height of left head 6¾ inches.



Found in Panama in 1858, about the time it was discovered that early native graves contained vast quantities of worked gold ornaments, this alligator pendant is almost six inches long, probably the largest size such objects reached. From the area of Chiriqui, it is typical of the realistically modeled animal pendants of the Isthmus, the most common form of which is the frog. The great majority of gold ornaments found in Central America are in pendant form, almost all suspended from a ring like the one on the chest of this alligator. The protuberant eye is also typical of such animal figures. Alligators are a common motif in Central American art, appearing also on ceramics and in both modeled and painted forms.

Gold alligator pendant. Chiriqui, Panama. Length 5 7/8 inches.





These large, fine examples of cast gold pendants come from graves in Costa Rica and Panama. Both display an often-repeated motif—combination human-animal features. On the left is a human body with the head of a bird of prey; the figure is posed in the act of eating a small creature who seems to be resisting, his feet on the monster's chest and his hands on the bill. The protuberant bird eyes are hollow and have little clappers of gold which act as bells. The wings are spread and ornamented on the edges; decorations on each side of the head and feet in cast spiral and open filigree work are most likely stylized representations of alligator heads. The pendant on the right has two human bodies with what appear to be monkey heads. Both pendants have a loop at the back and were apparently hung around the neck with a cord.

Two gold pendants. Costa Rica. Width of each pendant 3½ inches.



Practically nothing is known of the cultures which produced these fine jade objects in Costa Rica, but the tradition appears to be of great antiquity. Almost all of the jades were meant to be worn as pendants. This unusual double figure, drilled to be worn horizontally, shows a number of features typical of Costa Rican jade work. It is made of a white jadeite commonly worked in the area. String sawing, a method which was highly developed in the northeastern part of the country, was used to cut out the open areas in the piece. The flat, rectangular shape is a common form and the depiction of two human figures joined at the feet is unique to Costa Rica. The deep notch leaving "ears" on the top of the head is seen on both human and bird-form jades. The eyes are drilled and both nose and mouth are rendered in a single incised trapezoidal figure. The hands cross the body in a manner characteristic of such jades.

Stone pendant, two joined figures. Costa Rica. Height 5¼ inches. Gift of Mr. Ernest Erickson.

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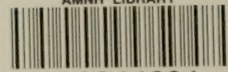




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